# THE

# BANSBERIA RAJ.

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BY

**SHUMBHOO CHUNDER DEY, B. A., B. L.**

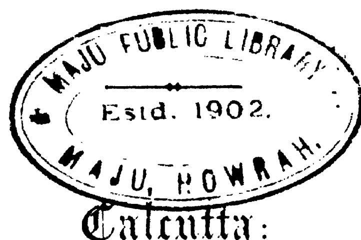
VAKIL, HIGH COURT, CALCUTTA

AND

AUTHOR OF "HOOGHLY : PAST AND PRESENT;" "BENGAL UNDER HINDOO, MAHOMEDAN AND ENGLISH RULE;" "A SHORT HISTORY OF CALCUTTA SUPREME, SADAR AND HIGH COURTS;" "NOTICES OF EMINENT JUDGES OF THE SAID COURT;" "A DISCOURSE ON THE JUDGE," &c.



*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.*




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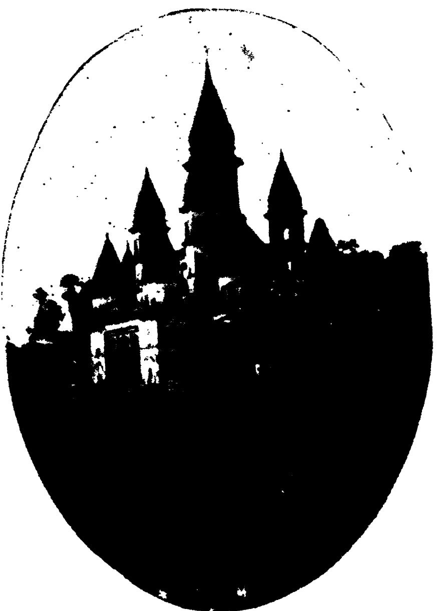
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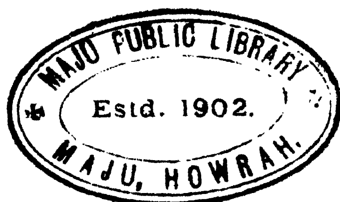


HAMSESVARI TEMPLE SHOWING THE MAHRATTA DITCH.



THE VISHNU TEMPLE.

*Blocks kindly lent by the Calcutta Historical Society.*




# THE BANSBERIA RAJ.

## INTRODUCTION.

THE Bansberia House occupies a very high place in the peerage of Bengal. Indeed, it yields to none in the antiquity of its origin, and may well be traced back at least to the time of Adisur, the last of the founders of independent Hindu dynasties. Its grand old parent was held in esteem by that famous king and was consulted on all important occasions. The family fared well during Hindu supremacy, but when like a bolt from the blue the 'canny' Afghan dealt a death-blow to the Sen dynasty, it removed to a safer place and having lurked there in dim obscurity for centuries together again emerged into light with the dawn of Mogul rule. While the family was still living at Patuli, in the district of Burdwan, it was ennobled by Emperor Akbar the Great who decorated it with the title of *Rai*, which in those days bore much higher significance than it does now. But this distinction, high as it was, was only an earnest of greater honors which were soon to come. Shortly after Akbar's demise, the next Emperor, Jehangir, raised the status of the Patuli family by conferring upon its then chief the title of *Mazumdar.* This was undoubtedly a much higher distinction than *Rai* or *Zamindar*, for while there were a goodly number of *Rais* and *Zamindars*, there were only four *Mazumdars* in all Bengal. Of this sacred Vedic number was Bhabananda*, the reputed founder of the Nadia Raj.

* In the celebrated Fifth Report of the Select Committee Bhabananda is described as "Majumadar or temporary recorder of the jumma of the circar of Hooghly and crory, or Zamindar of the pargana of Aukerah." 'Aukerah' is evidently Ukhra, a well-known pargana in the district of Nadia.

Thus, by the then Lord of India from whom flowed as from a fountain all honors and decorations was the Patuli family placed on the same level with the Premier House in Bengal. But the family was destined to rise still higher. This climb almost to the topmost rung of the ladder, however, was made after the original family had broken up, and Rameswar, the fortunate recipient of the very noble title of *Rajah Mahasai*, had settled down for good in Bansberia. The merit of this distinction, however, lies not merely in its glorious uniqueness but also in its moral excellence. Thus, the Bansberia House possesses a rare peculiar eminence of its own, and, to compare great things with small, takes as much pride in it as the royal House of England does in what is called the brightest jewel on its diadem. No other branch of the Patuli family can as a matter of right lay claim to it, in as much as it originated at a time when not only the family had separated in estate, but the several branches had left their ancestral abode and settled down in different localities. The social annals of Bengal would be incomplete without an account of this family which has such a long brilliant record to show. The fame of the family is as resplendent now as it was "in the brave days of old", only that its fortune has to a certain extent suffered in the rough and tumble of the battle of life. The Bansberia House is the only relic of the grand old Patuli family that is worthy of special notice, the other branches having been relegated to the cold neglected region of want and indifference. Like some commanding hill it has borne its majestic head high above the walks and ways of ordinary humanity for centuries together and is likely to bear it equally high, if not higher still, for centuries more.



# CHAPTER I.

## The Parent Family and Devaditya.

In the good old days when the star of the Hindus was in the ascendant, when Northern India was for the most part ruled by Bijoy Sing and Bengal by Adisura, a person of the name of Devaditya Dutt bidding a long adieu to the magnificent city of Kanouj—the Kanyakubja, of the Sanscrit writers—was found slowly wending his way towards the south-east. Though he was accompanied by his family and was encumbered with the odds and ends of a Hindu household, still he found no difficulty in the way, and at last arrived at Mayapur * in the Muxadavad † district, but he did not settle there for good. Not long after, he moved to a place which he named after his patronymic, Duttabati, not far from the capital of the Bengal king. Devaditya, possessed as he was of great sterling merit, highly distinguished himself, thereby casting the fame of his ancestors, whatever it was, in the shade. He had deep regard for his great sovereign who on his part held him in high esteem. Though not actually in name, he was virtually his Prime Minister, and his words of wisdom were always listened to with attention and respect. Thus, Devaditya became a power in the land and his influence for good or for evil was very great, indeed. Basking under the sunshine of royal favour he rose high in rank and position, and, at last, when his time came, departed this world leaving a very handsome legacy to his son, Binayak Dutt. The son, however, was not at all worthy of the sire, at any rate he could not gain distinction in any way whatever. He lived and died like an ordinary mortal, without doing anything which might attract notice

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* There are several other places of the same name in Bengal, notably one in the district of Hooghly and one in 24 Parganas. The one below Achipur on the way to Diamond Harbour is noted for its powder magazine. The name Mayapur literally means the 'city of illusion.'

† This old antique name was changed into its present name by Nawab Jafar Khan who called it after his own title—Murshid Kuli—in the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

or extort praise. Indeed, for five generations together the family did not produce any man of note until we come to Jadab Dutt. This remarkable character flourished in the time when Raja Ballal Sen was on the throne of Bengal. It is somewhat curious that this king ascended the throne in the very year in which William of Normandy having defeated and slain Harold took possession of the English throne. Jadab did not take service of any kind, and, surely, there was no necessity for it, as he was a man of substance and had considerable property. But though not a servant of the sovereign, he was one of his trusted friends and advisers, and his valuable counsel, was as a rule taken on all important affairs of state. When Ballal Sen proposed to make a classification * of nobility, he asked Jadab as to the propriety of the measure. The latter apprehending the abuse of *kulinism* in the distant future gave a decidedly adverse opinion. Every means was employed to bring him over to the side of the king, but all to no purpose. Jadab, strong-minded as he was, stood firm as a rock and did not budge an inch from the views which he had already expressed on the subject. The king was certainly displeased but the sturdy Kayastha of the bold Utter-Rarhi sept had greater regard for the still small voice of the "inner seer" than the mandate of a powerful liege-lord. The result was that the family of Jadab was not included in the classification of Ballal but stood aloof in "stately solitude" as Virgil would have said. This fact is alone sufficient to show that Jadab who made light of the frowns of royalty must have been a man of considerable importance. Indeed, he belonged to the class of land-holders who possessed a large share of influence in Bengal. They were, as it were, the barons of the land, and the king could not make or unmake them at his will and pleasure. They had a position which even the sovereign power could not ignore. They were almost above the law

* In this matter of great importance Ballal was followed by the famous Raja Hara Sinha Deva of Mithila, who flourished in the first half of the fourteenth century. Like him the Maithil king divided the Brahmins and Rajpoots into different classes, and this classification is still observed in the modern district of Tirhut. The dynasty of Sheo Sing, the patron of Vidyapati, "the morning star" of Bengali poetry, followed that of Hara Sinha Deva, and was succeeded in its turn by the Darbhanga House. See Sarbadhicari's Tagore Law Lectures p. 396.

and wielded very great powers in their little estates. They were only a step below the higher class of Zamindars and that step was a very short one. In the *Mulfoozat Timooree* or, memoirs of Timour, two kinds of Zamindars are taken notice of—one superior, having a country and subjects, and the other, inferior or dependent; and it is at least probable that the former may have been the successors of ancient Rajas, or rulers of the country, while the latter were subordinate chiefs, or perhaps landed proprietors, of the country. It would appear that both the superior and the inferior Zamindars had been left at the first conquest of the country in the possession of some of the powers which they originally held in their particular parganas, so far as was consistent with a general subjection to the conquerors *. Jadab was not a Zamindar in the highest sense of the term, and, as a matter of fact, it was pretty long before his family was honoured with that titular distinction between which and a petty prince there was not much to choose. But though not a Zamindar of the superior order, Jadab's position and influence was considerable. He lived his days in peace and glory, and when the "fatal sisters" cut the thread of his life, departed this world, leaving a numerous progeny, consisting of ten sons and seven grandsons. As ill luck would have it, this happy and flourishing family, in an evil hour, incurred the grave displeasure of the reigning sovereign, who, carried away by sudden gusts of anger, ordered their total destruction. The order being strict and peremptory, it was soon carried into effect, and, thus this prosperous family which to all appearance bade fair to have a long life, ran a very serious risk of being cut off root and branch. But man proposes, God disposes. It had, however, been ordained by the Great Disposer that the family should not cease altogether, so that in spite of the cruel resolve and strenuous efforts † of Ballal Sen to the contrary,

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* Vide Neil B. E. Bailie's Land Tax of India, pp. XXXVI and XXXVII 2nd Edition.

† A more striking instance of Ballal Sen's violent temper is to be found in the case of his only son and heir, Lakshman Sen. Once on a time the Prince had given some offence to royalty and the king, his father, took it so much to heart that, carried away by his ruling passion which "like Aaron's serpent swallow'd all the rest," he readily ordered his decapitation. Lakshman, who then happened to be somewhat off from the royal presence, on hearing of this cruel order and knowing full well the

it was saved from the general massacre and it is very gratifying to observe that the parent tree still exists with all its noble branches and offshoots. One of the sons of Jadab was Maheswar, and though he himself could not escape from the horrible carnage, wonderful to say, his delicate wife who was big with child, saved her life by flight. In due time this helpless lady gave birth to a fine little son, who, in view of his miraculous deliverance was given the queer name of Ubaru. It does not appear where the daring mother had fled to, but there could be no doubt that it was an insignificant place, considerably remote from the royal seat. Poor Ubaru grew up in obscurity, and,

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nature of his royal sire, lost no time in making his escape into the territory of some neighbouring potentate. Being sorely affected by the absence of her lord, Lakshman's young wife gave vent to her sorrow in a Sanscrit couplet which she took care to inscribe on the front wall of the Temple of the Family Idol, in the hope that it might attract the notice of the king. The verses were as follows :—

পতত্য বিরতং বারি নৃত্যন্তি শিখিনে মুদা।
অদ্য কান্তঃ কৃতান্তো বা দুঃখ শান্তিং করোতু মে ॥

( Rains are falling incessantly and peacocks are dancing in joy, this day my sorrow can only find relief either in my lover or in death. )

Fortunately these pathetic lines soon caught the eyes of the king who, being moved by the tender feelings they so eloquently expressed, instantly ordered the boat-men to his presence and solemnly made this declaration before them, that whoever should succeed in bringing up his most beloved son within a specified time should have their prayers, whatever it was, fulfilled to the best of his power.

Encouraged by the hopeful words of the king, some boatmen, bolder than the rest, offered to go in search of the Prince and launching a well-rigged vessel, at once started on their venturous quest, and, as good fortune would have it, erelong succeeded in their attempt. When Ballal Sen again sighted the face of his missing child whom he had almost taken for lost, his joy knew no bounds, and he readily asked the successful boatmen what their prayer was. They replied that their only request was that they might be permitted to wash his royal feet. The request, simple as it was, was there and then complied with and from that day the Kaibarthas whose water had hitherto been held polluted were permitted to serve the twice-born—a privilege which they still enjoy, even though Hindu rule has long since become a thing of the past. See Lal Mohan Vidyanidhi's Sammandha Nirnaya.

as he was a friendless young man, could not do much to improve the condition in which he had been placed. He lived and died an ordinary mortal, leaving a son named Kulapati. Though the latter bore a high name, he too failed to give a better turn to the fortune of the family. Like his father, he died unnoticed and unknown. But what distinguishes his case from that of his father, Ubaru, is that he left a large progeny, consisting of nine children. Of these sons, the eldest, Kabi Dutt, was the ablest and most important. Fortune again smiled upon the family, and this worthy descendant of Devaditya rose sufficiently high. As was quite natural, he longed to go back to the place founded by his famous ancestor and in this he was also favoured by circumstances. By this time Raja Ballal Sen had gone to give his last account before a much higher Tribunal, leaving his throne to his worthy son Lakshman Sen. As the latter was a milder ruler than the ferocious Ballal, Kabi Dutt found no difficulty in gaining his favour, and, availing himself of it, managed to return to his ancestral abode at Duttabati. There he rose high in rank and influence and was honoured with the title of Khan. Thus, he came to be known as the Khan of Duttabati. Kabi had six sons, of whom Ishwar was the ablest and most influential. Like his grandfather Kulapati, Ishwar had a very large family consisting of eight sons and nine daughters. But it does not appear that they all survived him. At any rate, among the sons, only Kisu ( Keshav ) and Bisu ( Bishen or Vishnu ) rendered themselves famous. Like the unfading banyan tree, Kisu has been the prolific parent that has kept alive the old Patuli family in all its glory and magnificence. As for his younger Bishu, he distinguished himself in another way. He got a high appointment under the Mahomedan Governor of Bengal and acquired considerable property in the district of Dinajpur. Along with this rise in material condition, his social rank was heightened by his being honoured with the title of *Thacoor Mahashai.* He died, leaving a son, named Sreemanta, who, like him, was a high official in the service of the Provincial Governor. Sreemanta flourished towards the end of the fifteenth century when the seat of Government was at Rajmahal. He was a Canongoe, who, unlike the officers bearing the same name in the present day, was charged with the collection of the Imperial revenues and exercised both civil and military powers over the people in his jurisdiction. Sreemanta having lost his only son during his life-time, gave away his estate to his son-in-law, Hariram Ghose

a Kulin Kayastha. Thus, Hariram became a very influential man, and lived in a rich style. He had two sons, of whom Sukhdeb succeeded to his property. The son became more famous than the father, and obtained from the ruling power the proud title of 'Raja.' Thus, the Dinajpur Raj dates from him. He also received a *firman* from Shah Shuja, Viceroy of Bengal, in 1063 B. S. The extended tank, Sukhsagar, which keeps his name afresh in the memory of the people, was excavated by him in 1677 A. D. He occupied the *Gadi* from 1644 to 1681, and died, leaving his estates to his second son, Jaydeva, his eldest son, Ramdeva, having died in his lifetime. Jaydeva, however, had a very short career. He died soon after his ascension to the *Gadi*, and was succeeded by his younger brother, Prananath. The latter's adopted son, Ramnath, got the title of "Maharaja Bahadur," and highly distinguished himself by his many good and pious acts. An idea of his vast estates might be formed from the simple fact that he had to pay over five lakhs of rupees in the shape of Government revenue. The present Maharajah, Girija Nath, who was adopted by Maharaja Tarack Nath's widow, Maharani Shyam Mohini, is the sixth in descent from Maharajah Ram Nath, the richest and most powerful of the Dinajpur Rajas.



# CHAPTER II.

## Exodus to Patuli and rise to the rank of 'Zamindar.'

On Keshav's death his son, Dwarka Nath, succeeded to his estates and became the head of the family. By this time the Moslem rule had spread far and wide and the Hindus were harassed in every possible way. The Mahomedan Governor of Muxadavad ruled the district with a rigour in which fanaticism formed an important element so that Dwarka Nath found it absolutely necessary to leave his jurisdiction in order to avoid cruel religious persecution. He, accordingly, removed to Patuli, some ten or twelve miles to the south of the historic town of Katwa *, in the district of Burdwan. Patuli, though a small village, is very beautifully situated. It stands on the right bank of the Bhagirathi, and is also within hail of the Ajai which joins the former at Katwa. Patuli was also the original seat of the well-known Gossain family of Serampore in the district of Hooghly. Here Dwarka Nath, built a palatial residence worthy of the renowned family which he represented. The Patuli palace lasted for several generations after which it fell a prey to the ravages of the river. The Bhagirathi gradually encroached upon the spot and at last swallowed up the princely mansion with all its belongings, thereby converting the place into a deep whirling pool of water which is known as the Patuli *Daha*. Dwarka Nath's grandson, Sahasraksha †, was a very pious and kind-hearted landholder. He ingratiated himself into the favour of the mighty Mogul Emperor, Akbar, who by a *Firman* or *Sanad* dated in the year 980 Bengal era, corresponding to 1573 A.D., formally declared him "Zamindar". This was no small honour done to him. For in point of rank a Zamindar, properly so called, occupied a very high place. The meaning of the word is, no doubt, a landholder, but custom had attached to the term a rank which a mere landholder could not aspire to. The Zamindar possessed considerable powers over his tenantry. He was not only their protector from outside enemies but

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* More properly called Kantakpalli, "the village built of brambles.

† The word means "thousand-eyed", a name of the god, Indra.

also their judges in matters, civil and criminal, arising between themselves. Indeed, he had almost absolute power over their lives and properties, only that his actions were subject to the control of the Provincial Governor. In the *Ayeen Akbari*, mention is made of a class of persons called Zamindars, as forming an important part of the military force of the Empire. In Bengal they are described as furnishing large bodies of cavalry and infantry, besides cannon, boats and elephants *. These were probably the twelve traditional Bhuyan or "original" Zamindars of Bengal, who held a hereditary status in their respective territories. As Dr. Hunter says, such Zamindars held princely courts, maintained their own bodies of armed followers, dispensed justice in their territories or estates, and handed their position from father to son. But all of them paid a tribute or a land tax to the Mahomedan Government at Murshidabad, and, as a rule, in cases of death, the heir deemed it prudent to obtain from that Government an official acknowledgment of his succession †. Sahasraksha, it is true, did not possess all the powers and privileges of such a first class Zamindar, but there seems to be little doubt as to his having been raised to a status higher than that of a mere revenue agent of the Ruling Powers. On the occasion of his being recognised as Zamindar, Sahasraksha was given the Zamindari right of Pargana Faizullahpur in the district of Nadia. True to his name he did many good acts and was held in high esteem by the people. In the fulness of time he passed away in peace.

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* See Neil B. E. Baillie's "Land Tax of India" (1873). p. 36.

† See Bengal Records, Volume I. p. 33.

## CHAPTER III.

# Glorious progress under Udaya and Jayananda.

On Sahasraksha's death, his son, Udaya, succeeded to his rank and estate. The new Zamindar became more famous than his father. In his hand the family rose both in honor and opulence. In consequence of his having done some important services to the Mogul Government, Udaya gained the favour of the same Great Emperor who had been so kind to his father. Akbar conferred upon him the hereditary title of *Rai**, after which the family renouncing the humbler designation of Dutt assumed the prouder one of *Rai*. Udaya not only raised the social status of his family, he also considerably added to its estate. This he managed to do through the favour of Raja Man Sing who was a great favourite of Emperor Akbar. When that valiant Rajput who was the commander-in-chief of the Mogul forces was coming with a large body of followers to Bengal, he on his way stopped for sometime at Beneras with a view to paying his regards to his *Guru* (spiritual guide) Jiya (Jiva) † who was residing at that sacred city. It so happened that Lakshmikanta, the only son of the Guru, had been for some time passing his days *incognito*, unknown to the father, and as it was very probable that he might be travelling or toiling somewhere in the East, the wise old man, whose heart was still lit with the lambent love of kith and kin, earnestly directed Man Sing to find out, if he could, the whereabouts of his beloved child. The Mogul General who regarded his spiritual preceptor as his God on earth, never forgot his injunction, and, as a matter of fact, was always on the alert how to carry it out. As fortune would have it, while passing by the banks of the Bhagirathi he met the Patuli ‡

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* Udaya's full title was Sabhapati Rai. And truly did he shed lustre on the Samaj of Patuli, for, as the Ghattack Karika has it :—

"পাটুলীতে দত্ত উদয় সভা শোভা করে।"

† Jiya ( Jiva ) renounced the world and led the life of an ascetic. He had a brother named Sheo ( Shiva ) who was a householder. The latter is commonly regarded as the ancestor of the well-known Ganguli Brahmans of Amatya, though that honor really belongs to his elder, Jiya.

‡ Patuli was not far from Amatya, the original residence of Jiya.

Zamindar Udaya, and deeming him a fit person to enquire about the missing young man communicated his wish to him. The latter, anxious as he was to oblige the great General, took up the matter in right good earnest and after some enquiry found the missing boy in the vicinity of Kalighat, whom he readily presented to the Ambar Chief *. Man Sing was highly pleased with Udaya and in the ecstasy of joy, asked him how he might please him in his turn. Udaya submitted that he was quite content with what he had, but as he every now and then had to move up and down the holy river, Bhagirathi, and would very much like to die on its banks he would be greatly delighted if he could get some places by its side so that he might not have to draw his last breath in the soil of somebody else. The grateful Rajput hero gladly acceded to his request and with the permission of his master, the Great Mogul, which he duly obtained, bestowed † on him some places on the banks of that

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* It is, however, stated in the last Census Report—on what authority the writer does not say,—that Jiya's infant son had risen to be the chief officer of Maharaja Pratapaditya, 'the hero of the Sunderbuns', and that when Raja Man Sing was sent down to Bengal by Emperor Jehangir to punish Pratapaditya and bring him as a captive to Delhi, the Mogul General's first object was to withdraw his Guru's son from his service which object, it is said, he carried out through the help of Jayananda Sudramani. There is, however, no reliable evidence to show that Jiya's son ever served Pratapaditya or had anything to do with him. In fact, that son who had been residing somewhere near the temple of the Goddess Kali at Kalighat was found out by the Patuli Zamindar, Udaya, and not by Jayananda, as the writer says. And it was not Jayananda, but Raghudeb who for a signal act of generosity was for the first time honoured with the title of "Sudramani." The writer has also erred in stating that Jayananda was taken into the service of Emperor Jehangir as "Majumadar" (collector), the fact being that that post was bestowed upon him by the next Emperor, Shah Jehan.

† For the assistance which Bhabananda had rendered to Man Sing in conquering Jessore and capturing its king Pratapaditya, the victor had him granted the Zamindari rights of fourteen Parganas. The grant was made by the Emperor, under a Sanad dated in the year 1015 H. E. corresponding to 1605 A. D. In the Sanscrit "Kshitish Vangsavali Charitam" it is stated that along with the said Zamindari the title of Raja was also conferred on Bhabananda. But the matter is not free from doubt. At any rate the Sanad makes no mention of it. See Kartikaya Rai's book, pp. 79,80.

river *. Like his father, Udaya when his time came, passed away in peace.

The deceased left four sons of whom Jayananda was the eldest. All his brothers having died childless, Jayananda came by the whole

* See Lal Mohan Vidyanidhi's Supplement to the "Sammandha Nirnaya" where appear the following verses :—

"মানসিংহ মহারাজ, কাশীতে আছিল।
জীয়োর নিকটে তিঁহ উপদিষ্ট হল ॥
রাজারে কহিল দ্বিজ, শুন বাপধন।
করিতেছ শুনি, তুমি বঙ্গেতে গমন ॥
মম পুত্রে গিয়া তুমি, ঠিকানা করিবা।
সেই কার্য্য করি বাপ, মোরে বাঁচাইবা ॥
বঙ্গেতে আসিয়া রাজা, সে কার্য্য করিল।
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তারপর রাজা, গুরুপুত্র দরশন।
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শূদ্রমণি মহাশয়, করজোড় করি।
দেখেন, রাজার মনে আনন্দ লহরী ॥
রাজা বলে, ওহে তুমি যে কার্য্য করিলা।
তার পরিতোষ তুমি লহ এই বেলা ॥
মহাশয় কহিলেন, আপন কৃপায়।
অভাব নাহিক কিছু, এই বাঞ্ছা হয় ॥
ঈশ্বরীর তীরে মম তরণী ভিড়ান।
নিজ দেহ নিজ স্থানে পায় যেন স্থান ॥
মধ্যে মধ্যে আছে মম গমনাগমন।
দুই চারি দিন করি, নীরে যে ভ্রমণ ॥
তথাস্তু বলিয়া রাজা, তাহাই যে করিল।
গঙ্গার পশ্চিম তটে বহু স্থান দিল ॥

The title "Sudramani," however, was not given either in the time of Akbar or in that of Jehangir; it was first bestowed on Raghudeb by Nawab Murshid Kuli Khan in the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

property left by his father. At that time Jehangir was on the throne of Delhi. It does not appear that Jayananda had received any marks of favour from that Emperor, but there is direct evidence to show that he received some very high favours from his son and successor. Indeed in the very year* in which Shah Jehan ascended the throne, honours and decorations flowed in as it were, upon the Zamindars of Patuli. The Emperor graced him with the title of *Mazumdar* † and granted him the Zamindari right of Pargana Kot Ectiarpur ‡ as *jaigir*, while the Governor of Bengal, Kasim Khan Juwaini, following the example of his Imperial master, appointed him Canongoe or registrar of fiscal division. It is not clear whether Jayananda was made Sadar Canongoe, chief registrar at the seat of Government, or Pargana Canongoe, that is, registrar of fiscal division only. The probability, however, is that he was made the former, as the office of a common Canongoe was naturally inconsistent || with the position of a Zamindar. Jayananda was a contemporary of Bhabananda §, the reputed founder of the Nadia

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* Shah Jehan ascended the throne in 1035 B. S. corresponding to 1628 A. D.

† The proper word, however, is Majumadar which means recorder of the "jama" of a Sarkar. Bhabananda as recorder of the jama of Sarkar Satgaon, held the title of Majumadar—a title so common among Bengal families, and generally corrupted to Mazumdar. See Hunter's Statistical Account of Bengal, Volume I. pp. 362-63.

‡ One of the "original" 24 Parganas.

|| In 1783, Joy Narayan Ghosal of the Bhukoylas Raj family was dismissed from the office of Canongoe of Sandwip on the ground that the office was incompatible with the position of a Zamindar. The Canongoe had no fixed salary attached to his office, but was paid a commission (rasum) which in some cases rose to a very large figure. See Hunter's Statistical Account of Bengal Vol. VI. p. 182. Now-a-days, officers bearing that name are paid fixed salary, and their position is comparatively low.

§ In the famous Fifth Report of the Select Committee, it is stated that Raghuram a lineal descendant of Bhabananda, " enlarged the jurisdiction of Nadia, to its present magnitude, in the Government of Jaffer Khan. The district gained some respectability under the long and crafty management of Kissen Chund ; but is now in danger of being reduced or dismembered through the incapacity of his son Shib Chandra, the profligacy of his servants, and mode of realising balances." Vide Fifth Report p. 371 ( 1812 ).

House which is so well-known to fame. Indeed, the two families which graced the banks of the sacred Bhagirathi were closely bound by the ties of friendship and lived in amity and peace. At any rate, we know of no instance in which their mutual good feelings were disturbed. Jayananda departed this world probably in the third decade of the seventeenth century. So did his friend, Bhabananda of Nadia.



# CHAPTER IV.

## Raghab Rai Chaudhuri and the Bansberia House.

Jayananda left five sons of whom Raghab was the eldest, and as the other sons died leaving no issue, Raghab like his father, ultimately became the sole owner of the entire family property. Raghab was equally fortunate with Jayananda and like him succeeded in gaining the favour of the Emperor, Shah Jehan, who by a Sanad dated the 12th Rubi 1066 H. E. ( 1649 A.D. ) conferred upon him the title of "Chaudhuri" and in the year following that of "Mazumdar." The bestowal of these titular distinctions was not unaccompanied by grants of a substantial character, for, as a matter of fact, Raghab got vast Lakhraj or rent-free lands as absolute gifts and the Zamindari right of the following twenty-one Parganas*, namely, Arsha, Haldaha, Mamdanipur, Panjnaur, Boro, Shahapur, Jehanabad, Shaistanagore, Shahanagore, Raipur Kotwali, Paonan, Khosalpore, Moiat, Buxbunder, Havilishahar, Paikan, Mozzaferpore, Hathikanda, Selimpur, Amirabad, and Janglipur. As the greater part of these estates lay in Sarkar Satgaon, Raghab for the better management of these large additions to his ancestral property, was obliged to put up near Satgaon or rather Buxbunder Hooghly, the then capital of Lower Bengal, and he, accordingly, built a large house at a village two miles to the east on the right bank of the river Hooghly, to which he gave the name of Bangshabati, commonly known as Bansberia, and began to spend most part of the year there, paying occasional visits to his ancestral house at Patuli, especially at the time of the Durga Puja At this time Bansberia was a small insignificant village with a sparse population, consisting mostly, of the dregs and scum of society. It was

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* Of these Parganas Arsha, Boro, Jehanabad, Khosalpore, Buxbunder, Mozzaferpore, Hathikanda, Selimpur, and Paonan, are in Hooghly; Mamdanipur, Shahapur, Raipur Kotwali, Shahanagore, Havilishahar Paikan and Amirabad in 24-Parganas; and Haldaha and Panjnaur in Nadia; Shaistanagore, Moiat and Janglipur cannot be identified.

largely covered with thick jungles in which the denizens of the forest held their solitary sway. Raghab reclaimed the jungles, and, in the place of the savages of the wood whom he had killed or cast out, settled human beings of different orders by making them grants of rent-free lands and helping them in various other ways. Thus, what was a little obscure village, partly tenanted by savage beasts and partly by equally savage men, became in a few short years something like a town with a large sprinkling of peaceful citizens of all castes and creeds.

Raghab was a remarkable man. Not only did he raise the Patuli family in honor, he also added much to its affluence. The Zamindari left by his father was considerably augmented by the addition of one and twenty Parganas. Some of these Parganas were very large and rich. The gross collections of the biggest and richest of them all namely, Aesha in Sarkar Satgaon amounted to upwards of two lakhs. Indeed, the net profits after paying the Government revenue in respect of that single Pargana were sufficient to entitle a man to be called a big Zamindar. Thus, Raghab had become one of the greatest men and was deservedly held in high esteem by the neighbouring Zamindars. He lived like a prince and died full of years and honours.

# CHAPTER V.

## Rajah Rameswar Rai Mahasal.

Raghab Rai Chaudhuri left two sons, Rameswar and Basudeb. These two brothers were in the best of terms and, as a matter of fact, lived very happily for sometime. But at last, a change came over their minds and they thought of dividing their property. They did not, however, go to law, but came to an amicable arrangement in which the right of the elder, as has been the custom in this family, was duly recognised, he in consideration of priority of birth getting two-thirds and the younger * one-third only. Shortly after partition of the family property in the manner as stated above, Rameswar removed with his family to Bansberia which he made his permanent dwelling house, paying only random visits to the old palace at Patuli. Thus the latter place dwindled down into insignificance while the former rose to considerable importance. Rameswar brought several families of Brahman, Kshetrya, Kayastha, Baidya and other castes and settled them in the new town, which he divided into different *paras* or sections, each section being assigned to persons belonging to one particular caste and calling. Along with the Hindus some Mahomedans were also brought in and were allotted lands in the western portion of the town. These Pathans served as guards and soldiers to the House. Their descendants still live there, though considerably reduced in

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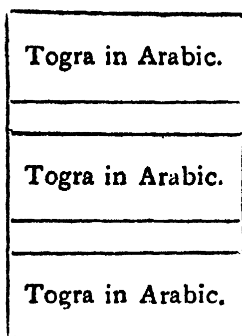
* Basudeb had two sons, Monohar and Gangadhar, and who on their father's demise divided their property in the proportion of ten annas and six annas. Monohar removed to Sheoraphuli and founded the family of that name. Gangadhar having died childless, his six annas share was taken possession of by Durga Prosad, youngest son of Raj Chunder, son of Monohar, who removed to Bali and founded the family of that name. Thus the Sheoraphuli and the Bali families have come to be known as the ten-anna and six-anna Zamindars respectively.

numbers. The northern portion was assigned to the Baidyas and what are collectively called the Nabasaks; while the eastern and the southern portion were divided among three hundred and sixty families of Brahman and a goodly number of Kshetrya and Kayastha families.

Rameswar also directed his attention to the very important subject of education. He founded several *tols* or Sanscrit schools and placed them under charge of learned Pundits who were brought in mostly from Benares. In these schools were taught the Darsanas or branches of Hindu learning viz: Darsan *par excellence* or philosophy, Nyaya or logic, Sahitya or pure literature, Alankara or rhetoric, Smriti or law and Sruti or the Vedas. Of the Pundits so brought down, the most eminent was Ramsharan Tarkabagish of Benares, the Athens of India, who was, therefore, appointed by Rameswar as his Sabha (court) Pundit. Ramsharan held this high office till his death after which it has been all along held by his descendants from generation to generation who look upon it with pride *. Rameswar was a loyal subject of the Great Mogul and had always the welfare of Government at heart. Having found that some persons were wrongfully enjoying the profits of certain Parganas without paying anything to Government, he with the knowledge and consent of the Provincial ruler took prompt steps against them and having succeeded in ousting them from these estates, took possession thereof on behalf of the powers that be. This good service being brought to the notice of the ruling Emperor, Aurangzeb, otherwise called Shah Alumgir, who though a stern bigot in matters of religion, was never backward in rewarding merit, wherever it was found, justly thought that such a well-wisher of Government richly deserved special favour at his hands, and he, accordingly by a Sanad dated in the year 1673 A. D., conferred upon him the rare title of "Rajah Mahasai" together with *Punj-Percha* Khelat or dress of honor made up of five pieces, which title was not a mere personal distinction, but was made hereditary in the family descendible to the eldest branch thereof.

* The Bansberia Samaj thus formed by Rameswar appears to be the oldest and most famous in this part of the country. The Pundit Samaj at Bhatpara yields the palm to it, its founder, Narain Thakoor, having flourished much later.

The Sanad, evidencing the bestowal of the above title, is a very important piece of document and its importance is greatly enhanced when it is considered that it emanated from a sovereign who was a confirmed hater of Hindus and who left no stone unturned to demolish their faith. It is in Persian and bears the Imperial Seal. An English translation thereof which has been certified to be correct by a good Persian scholar, Mr. Henry Beveridge late of the Indian Civil Service, is given below :—







Seal of the Emperor.

*TO*

*RAJAH RAMESWAR RAI MAHASAI*

*Pargana Arsha, Sarkar Satgaon.*

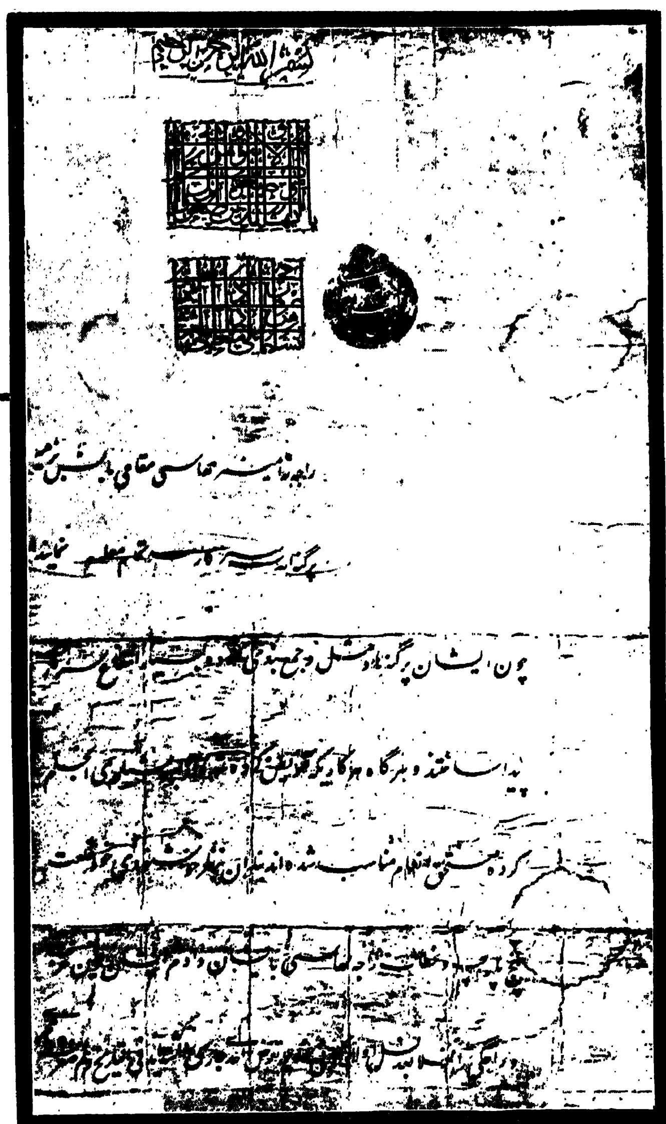
*( Government of Satgaon. )*

*As you have promoted the great interest of Government in getting possession* * *of Parganas and making assessments thereof, and as you have performed with care whatever services were entrusted to you, you are entitled to reward. The Khelat of Punj Percha ( five cloths i. e, dresses of honor ) and the title of "Rajah Mahasai" are therefore given to you in recognition thereof, to be inherited by the eldest children of your family, generation after generation, without being objected to by any one* †. *10 Safar, 1090 Hijri.*

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* In later times Sitaram Roy of Mahmudpur in the district of Jessore was given the title of "Raja" for some such act by the same Government. This valiant chief forms the subject of one of Bunkim Babu's novels.

† The original Sanad was exhibited, at the annual meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, held on 5th February, 1902, by its then President, the late Sir John Woodburn M. A. K. C. S. I, Lieutenant-Gover-



SANAD OF THE HEREDITARY TITLE OF RAJAH MAHASAI GRANTED TO RAMESWAR RAI BY AURANGZEB IN 1673 A.D.

By another Sanad of the same year he was granted 401 bighas of rent-free lands for his residence * and the Zamindari right of the following twelve Parganas, † namely Kalikata, (Calcutta) Dharsa, Amirpur, Balanda, Khalore, Manpur, Sultanpore, Hathiagarh, Medamulla, Kujpore, Kaunia and Magura.

At the time we are speaking of, a reign of terror had begun in this part of Bengal, owing to the repeated incursions of the Marhattas or *Burgees* as they were called in common parlance. Locust-like they came in numbers and plundered everything they could lay their hands upon ‡. Like many other

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nor of Bengal. Vide Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal 1902, p. 45.

* In accordance with this Sanad, the British Government has exempted the lands for the residence of the Rajah from payment of rent since 1st September 1870 under clause 7 (a) of Section 2, Chapter XXIII of the existing rules of the Board.

† Of the Parganas, Amirpur, Balanda, Manpur, Hathiagarh, Medamulla, (now called Maidamal) and Magura are in 24 Parganas; Kalikata and Sultanpore in Nadia, and Dharsa in Hooghly. The rest are not identifiable. Balanda is famous for its mats which are so largely used by the common people. It contains the town of Harua, the burial place of Gora Chand, the legendary saint of the district. Hathiagarh, the most southerly Mahal of Sarkar Satgaon, is a large Pargana, extending from Diamond Harbour towards Sagar Island, and has a high value in legendary accounts. Bhagirath of the Solar Roll having led the way as far as Hathiagarh then declared that he could not show the rest of the way, whereupon mother Ganga, in order to make sure of reaching her destination, divided herself into a hundred mouths thus forming the Delta. One peculiarity of this Pargana is that betel-leaf does not grow in it. Medamulla south-east of Calcutta mostly belongs to the Chaudhuris of Baruipore. Magura lies to the south of Calcutta. Sultanpore lies east of Krishnagore, between the Ichamati and the Kapadah. Dharsa is on the right bank of the Hooghly, between Howrah and Serampore.

‡ During Sivaji's life, all plunder was public property. It was brought at stated periods to his Durbar, when the man who had taken it was praised, rewarded or promoted.

"Then lands were fairly portioned;
Then spoils were fairly sold;
The 'Burgees' were like brothers,
In the brave days of old."

places Bansberia and its neighbourhood suffered much from their cruel devastating raids. Their very name struck terror into the hearts of the residents and was used in the nursery to frighten little children to sleep. The name of the Lion-hearted Richard was not more dreaded in Constantinople during the Crusades than that of the Burgees in Bengal towards the end of the seventeenth century and the first part of the eighteenth. Rajah Rameswar, in order to secure himself and his property against the ravages of the Marhatta marauders at a great cost caused a deep and wide ditch or moat to be dug around his extensive dwelling house, with the grounds adjoining it. It covers nearly a mile in circumference. The royal residence being thus moated, it has since been known as the *Gurbati* * (a range of buildings encompassed by a ditch). Curiously enough the Rajbati with the lands attached thereto, considerably resemble the lists made by the old Athenian king, Theseus, for the purpose of a grand tournament. As the poet says,

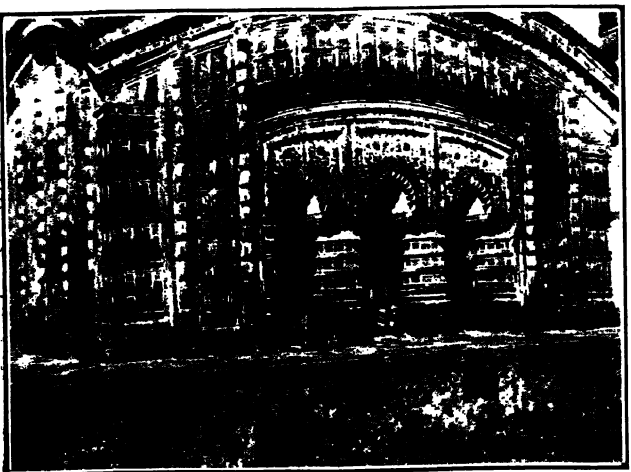
"The whole circumference, a mile long;
The form was circular, and all without
A trench was sunk to moat the place about" †.

The stately residence was not only surrounded by a trench, it was also defended by a fort which was built in such a way as to secure a strong strategic position. The fort ‡ was garrisoned by a goodly number of soldiers, who were armed with swords, shields, pikes, muskets, bows and arrows, and was mounted with several pieces of artillery. The sides of the moat were raised to a great height, and brambles and prickly shrubs were planted on them so as to impede the progress of the turbulent raiders. The Rajbati thus became an asylum for the neighbouring

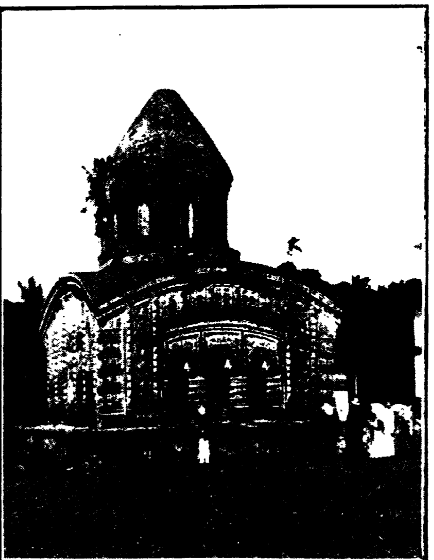
* The word literally means 'the moated House'. The term 'Gur' also means a fort or fortress, but here it means a ditch or trench. At Benipore in the 24 Parganas, there is also a place surrounded by a trench called Gurbati, where Rajah Nrisinhadeb built a fine house, noted for its artistic workmanship.

† See Dryden's Miscellaneous Works Vol. III. p. 39.

‡ The fort is not in existence, only some vestiges thereof, remaining a little to the north of the old gateway.



THE VISHNU TEMPLE.



THE VISHNU TEMPLE, BANSBERIA.

*Blocks kindly lent by the Calcutta Historical Society.*

villagers to resort to in times of danger. When the Marhatta horsemen, spreading ruin and desolation in their way, came near Tribeni, the people would flee thither for safety and protection.

Rajah Rameswar was an excellent type of an othodox Hindu of olden times. He had deep reverence for all the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, but the Deity that held possession of his heart in especial was Vishnu, otherwise styled Basudeb. To this paragon of beauty among the gods, he dedicated a splendid temple in 1601 Shak era (1679 A. D. ), which as a piece of architecture stands almost unrivalled in Bengal. The building is a striking proof of the wonders of the masonic art. The bricks all over the body of the shrine have been beautifully cut into figures of gods and goddesses, and the carving is really a marvel of the sculptor's art. A basalt slab attached to the terrace of the temple bears the following inscription in the old Bengali character :—

মহীব্যোমাঙ্গ শীতাংশু গণিতে শক বৎসরে * ।
শ্রীরামেশ্বর দত্তেন নির্ম্মমে বিষ্ণুমন্দিরং ॥ ১৬০১

There is one thing very peculiar in this inscription. The founder who held a very high position in society makes no parade of his rank but contents himself with the original family designation of Dutt. This simple fact is a striking proof of Rameswar's having been a sincere devotee and not a mere braggart or what is still worse, a hypocrite. Indeed, though one of the greatest and richest men of his time, he knew not what pride was, and had far greater regard for truth and virtue than for titles and riches, thereby verifying the words of the prince of Scottish poets :—

The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man is the gawd † for all that.

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* The year is f und in this way. মহী = 1, ব্যোম = 0, অঙ্গ = 6, and শীতাংশু = চন্দ্র = 1. Applying the well-known cannon of construction—অঙ্কস্য বামা গতি—figures move backwards—we get the year 1601 Shak, which corresponds to 1679 A. D.

† This word means 'gold'.



# CHAPTER VI.

## Rajah Roghudeb Rai Mahasai.

Rameswar died early in the beginning of the eighteenth century, leaving him surviving, three sons, viz: Roghudeb, Mukunda and Ramkrishna. These brothers did not live as a joint undivided family. On a partition taking place among them, Roghudeb, being the eldest, got, in right of primogeniture which has always been respected in this family, one-half of the property left by Rameswar, while the other two jointly got the other half; in other words, of the two-thirds of the parent estate received by Rameswar, Roghudeb got one-third and his two brothers one-third in common. This one-third, again, being sub-divided, Mukunda being the elder of the two got nine annas and Ramkrishna seven annas only.

It would appear that in the partition which had taken place between Rameswar and his brother Basudeb, pargana Arsha, the biggest of the estates of the family had in its full integrity fallen to the share of the former and he died possessed of it whole and entire. Similarly, Basudeb became absolute owner of pargana Boro, which had fallen to his share. Subsequently, the sons of Rameswar, having chosen to separate their patrimony, it became necessary to break up pargana Arsha, and, accordingly, a considerable portion was carved out of it and along with a large part of Boro formed into a separate Zamindari, which, to use the language of the famous Fifth Report of the Select Committee, was called "Zamindary Kismateah Mahomedameenpore." The estate, so formed, was a very big one, as would appear from the single fact of the Ausil and Towfeer thereof having been in the year 1172 A.B., that is, nearly twenty years after its formation, 206, 325 Sicca rupees. On the partition which took place between the two younger sons of Rameswar and his two nephews, the former got Mahomedameenpore proper in the proportion of ten and six annas, and the latter got Boro in the proportion of nine and seven annas. All these particulars would appear from the celebrated Fifth

Report referred to above. The portion of it which has direct bearing on the subject now under consideration, is so very important that we deem it necessary to quote it in *extenso*. The said Report, speaking of the Zamindary Kismut Mahomedameenpore says :—"This district, comprehending about 700 square miles, with all the European settlements in Bengal, on the western margin of the river Hooghly, from the Foujedarry capital of that name, or port custom-house called Bukhshbunder, down to the opposite shore of Calcutta, was dismembered from the Painam permanent holding of Arsha, then the *Eathiman* entire of Ramisser, a Koyt, father of Ragoodeess ( *i. e.* Roghudeb ), and grandfather of Govindes ( *i. e.* Govindadeb ), who succeeded to one-third of the whole trust, first erected into a separate zamindary, between the years 1135 and 1147 A. B. It was at the same time, partitioned among the former's two younger sons and two nephews, with a Brahmin dependent of the family, each of whom gave his own name, ( still retained on the Khalsa records, ) to the subdivision or portion so acquired; but all were assessed for revenue to Government under the single head of Mahomedameenpore, and in like manner paid alone, through the channel of the most considerable or responsible of the participants." Lower down the "subdivision or portion", spoken of above, is given as follows :—"Mokund, 2nd son of Ramisser, 9/16 of Mahomedameenpore, and Ramkissen, 3rd son of Ramissser, 7/16 of the same : Menoker ( *i. e.* Monohar ), his nephew, eldest son of Basdeo ( *i. e.* Basudeb ), 10/16 of Boroo, and Gungadher, 2nd son of Basdeo, 6/16 of the same. The Brahman dependant, referred to, is Suntose ( *i. e.* Suntosh ) of Answeerpore.

From what is recorded in the Fifth Report it is evident that the Zamindari of Mahomedameenpore, formed as it was principally out of Pargana Arsha, the sole absolute property of Rameswar, extended from Bukshbunder *alias* Hooghly on the one side to Ramkrishnapore, now in Zillah Howrah, on the other; that it was created between the years 1728 and 1740 A. D., that is, some years after the rule of Nawab Murshid Kuli Khan who died in 1725; that, though the estate, so formed, was subdivided into well-defined shares, it was one and entire, so far as Government revenue was concerned, which was payable by and through the principal shareholder, under the single head of Mahomedameenpore. Thus,

it is quite clear that among the members of this rich and renowned family, Roghudeb, who alone held one-third share of the whole family estates, was the most important character, and that, as between his two younger brothers and the sons of his uncle, Basudeb, Mukunda, who got nine annas share of Mahomedameenpore, held the foremost place. In no sense, therefore, could Monohar be equal, far less superior to Roghudeb, the fact being that he was inferior, in position, as well as in estate, not only to him, but also to his younger brother, Mukunda *.

Roghudeb who, as we have already stated, got one moiety of the property left by his father, Rameswar, rendered himself more famous by a very remarkable act of generosity. Murshid Kuli Khan was then Nawab of Bengal. He was a very energetic Governor and ruled the country with an iron rod. He curtailed the powers of the Foujdars of the several districts and made them subservient to his authority. The Zamindars of Bengal had become very powerful and it was high time that they should be put down, or at least reduced to a lower level. The Nawab in the exercise of his superior authority ousted † them all from their

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* Mukunda's share, whatever it has come to, is now represented by the Shibpur family and that of Ramkrishna by the Rajhat family. In the former case the property reduced as it is from what it was originally, is in the possession of descendants of a different branch altogether. Of these two families the Shibpur family fares better than the Rajhat branch. It is now represented by Rai Nolit Mohon Singh and has properties quite enough to enable a gentleman to live in a decent style. As for the other family it is considerably reduced, so much so that the members, as a rule, find it difficult to maintain their position in society.

† See Hunter's Bengal Records Vol. I. pp 34, 35. As regards the rights of the Zamindar, Professor H. H. Wilson thus expresses himself:—"The rights of the Zamindar have been the subject of much controversy with reference to his character as hereditary owner of the land he occupies, or as the responsible collector only of the revenue on behalf of the Government. Under the Mahomedan administration the latter was the capacity in which the Zamindar was ordinarily considered, and the chief authorities never hesitated to exercise the power, when they possessed it, of turning out a Zamindar and placing another in the Zamindari, whence the one in possession was termed Sanadi, or Alkami, the Zamindar by patent or command." ( See Glossary of Judicial

several estates and made fresh settlements with whomsoever he liked, certainly not in all cases with the former Zamindars, for if any one failed to furnish good and sufficient security for the regular payment of revenue, the estate was not restored to him but was settled with one who was in a position to give such security. In this way some very important changes were made in the revenue administration of the country, the effect of which was that there was a considerable increase in the sum total of the revenue payable to Government. This revenue, Murshid Kuli Khan was very strict in realising, and if any Zamindar defaulted in paying up the arrears due from him he was subjected to very severe punishments and was not allowed to go at large until he paid off his dues, or made some arrangements for the same. For the purpose of realising the revenue by having recourse to hard measures the Nawab had two principal agents who exhausted their armoury of cruelty in torturing the unfortunate defaulters. Of the several instruments of torture held in requisition, there was one which, whether we consider the originality of its plan or the effectiveness of its exercise, has no match on earth and has given its deviser a most unenviable notoriety. That mischievous imp of the devil had caused a tank to be dug and filled with ordure and everything filthy and noxious that could be thought of, and, to add insult to injury, styled it *Baikuntha*, the Paradise of the Hindus, in gross abuse of language. If any Hindu Zamindar, after having suffered all the other punishments, was still unwilling or unable to pay the arrears due, he was stripped naked and dragged through this infernal pool by a rope tied under his arms. Roghudeb on being informed that a defaulting Zamindar of the Brahman caste was about to be dragged into the abominable tank which though called Baikuntha, was the very reverse of it, came forward with

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and Revenue Terms.) Indeed, opinions differ very materially as to the status of the Zamindars, for while Mr. James Grant, speaking with all the authority of Sarrishtadar, or chief Record Keeper of Bengal had described them "as no more than annual contracting farmers or receivers of the public rents". Mr. C. W. Boughton Rouse devoted a chapter or rather volume to maintaining that "a general state of hereditary property existed in Bengal (See his Dissertation concerning the Landed Property of Bengal p. 20, London, 1791) and was vested in the Zamindars." Vide Hunter's Bengal Records Vol. I. p. 32.

his usual kindliness, and paying off the whole debt, relieved the Brahman Zamindar from the terrible suffering and ignominy which had awaited him. The Nawab, though unusually severe in matters which concerned Government revenue, was nevertheless alive to the charm of goodness and was not slow to reward real sterling merit wherever it was found. When this truly generous act on the part of Roghudeb reached his ears, he was much affected, and in token of the great pleasure, which he felt at this most striking instance of charity, bestowed upon its author, the proud title of "*Sudramani*" or the Jewel of Sudras. A writer in the *Calcutta Review* for 1845, however, says that the said act was done by "Monohar Roy, the Zamindar of Patuli", and that the said title was conferred upon him *. Speaking of Hurrish Chunder of the Sheoraphuli family, in whose time the *fracas* in connection with the bathing festival noticed by him took place, he says that "the Rajah, who is of the writer caste, is descended from one of the most ancient and respected families in Bengal, the well-known designation of which is *Sudramani* or the Jewel of Sudras" †. The writer is evidently under the impression that the title was conferred at the time when the family was still living in its original seat at Patuli, in as much as he describes Monohar as "the Zamindar of Patuli", and not of Sheoraphuli. And in his description of Hurrish Chunder also, the family he alludes to, is evidently the Patuli, and not the Sheoraphuli family. Now accepting what he says, to be correct, namely, that the bestowal of the title of *Sudramani* took place while the family was living in Patuli, the Monohar Roy referred to by him could not have been the son of Basudeb of the same name, the fact being that following the example of his brother, Rameswar, who removed to Bansberia, Basudeb also removed to a place still lower down the Hooghly and settled at Sheoraphuli. This being the real state of things, one might suppose that the writer probably meant Monohar

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* See Volume IV. p. 489. The writer, I may notice here, has been followed by Mr. Toynbee in his Sketch of the administration of the Hooghly District and the latter by Dr. Crawford in his History of the same district.

† See Ibid p. 488.

Roy *, brother of Udaya. But this could not be, as Udaya lived in the time of Emperor Akbar, while the undisputed bestower of the title, Murshid Kuli Khan, was Governor of Bengal, in the reign of Aurangzeb and his son Bahadur Shah. The above hypothesis being thus found to be quite untenable, we are thrown upon the only other resource that is left to us and to suppose that the Reviewer meant Monohar Roy, son of Basudeb, and also that the title was conferred after the family had settled down in Sheoraphuli. The writer, it is true, may have meant so, but as he does not cite any authority for his statement, we have only to consider the probabilities of the case in order to judge whether it is true or not. But on balancing the probabilities on both sides, we find that the preponderance is decidedly in favour of the claim of Roghudeb. Now, Roghudeb belonged to the elder branch of the parent family and was much richer than Monohar who got only ten-annas of the one-third share of Basudeb. Again in the rent-roll of Jafar Khan entitled Murshid Kuli, Roghudeb and not Monohar figures as a big landholder. In that important document the greater part of Arsha, one of the largest and richest Parganas in all Bengal is given as belonging to his Zamindari †. But not only was Roghudeb a more substantial Zamindar than his kinsman of the Sheoraphuli family, he was also more pious and had greater regard for Brahmans to whom he was liberal almost to a fault. In the famous Fifth Report, as we have already shown, Monohar is given an inferior place not only to Roghudeb, the owner of one-third share of the entire family property, but also to his second brother, Mukunda, who held nine annas share of the big Zamindari of Mahomedameenpore which extended from Hooghly on the one side to Ramkrishnapore on the other along the banks of the river which flows by them. All these circumstances tend to show that the title was probably given to Roghudeb rather than to Monohar. There is also another circumstance which considerably supports the conclusion we have arrived at. It is admitted on all hands that the title emanated from Murshid Kuli Khan, and, as that Satrap ruled Bengal from 1704 to 1725 it must have been

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* One of this name finds place in the Ain-Akbari, but he is a Rajput of Ajmere and has nothing to do with Bengal.

† See Hunter's Statistical Account of Bengal Vol. I. p. 363 note.

bestowed during that period; but there is no evidence to show that Monohar Roy had become a man of importance at that time, while the evidence in favour of Roghudeb on the point is most convincing. He had come by the whole property of his father, Rameswar, who, in addition to other properties, was owner of pargana Arsha, whole and entire, his brothers then living under his care and guardianship.

But the above-mentioned act of generosity magnanimous as it was, dwindles into insignificance when compared with Roghudeb's matchless charity to Brahmans to whom he is reported to have made surprisingly large grants of rent-free lands; and there is a saying current in this part of Bengal that no Brahman family which do not hold *Lakhraj Brahmutter* lands of the Bansberia Rajas deserve to be called Brahmans at all. In fact this noble scion of a renowned aristrocratic House was a very pious soul and his charity was commensurate with his piety. His good acts, mark him out as one of the most glorious of mortals, who did them not to gain fame, "that last infirmity of noble mind," as the British Homer calls it, but for the sake of the thing itself.

The ruinous raids of the Marhattas having become more frequent, Roghudeb, in order to render his residence and its surroundings far more secure against their attacks, caused a second trench to be dug around the first one, thereby providing a double line of defence. The said moat has to a large extent silted up; but the original one sunk by Rajah Rameswar is still in a very good state, and is well able to stand a seige or a blockade. There is a tradition current in this part to the effect that, once the Burgees, as the Marhatta free-booters were more commonly called, had laid seige to the fort for a few weeks, when on a dark night the garrison in a body sallied out, and quietly crossing the trench without being perceived by the enemy, suddenly fell upon them and committing some havoc compelled the rest to beat a hasty retreat. After this shameful discomfiture the Burgees were never seen in this part of the country.

# CHAPTER VII.

## Rajah Gobindadeb Rai Mahasai.

Roghudeb died, leaving an only son, named Gobindadeb to succeed to his titles and estates. Like his father this young prince was of a pious turn of mind and made large rent-free grants to Brahmans and to several noted shrines in Bengal. He might have done more good to the country in a Hindu point of view, but the term of his life was considerably short, and he breathed his last in the month of Aswin 1147 B. S. corresponding to October, 1740 A. D. *. In the time of Gobindadeb, Agradwip † the sacred seat of the god, Gopinath, was lost to the Patuli Zamindari to which it had belonged, and became the property of the Nadia Raj. The acquisition was very cleverly made and did immense credit to the admirable tact and presence of mind on the part of the agents of the Nadia Rajah. At that place a *mela* takes place in the month of Chaitra in honor of the Deity located there, when a vast crowd assemble from different parts of the country. On one such occasion some five or six pilgrims had lost their lives in the tremendous rush. This sad occurrence coming to the notice of the Nawab of Murshidabad, he was highly enraged and in the fury of the moment asked the agents of the neighbouring Zamindars present at the

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* Kirti Chunder, the powerful Zamindar of Burdwan, also died in the same year. The Revd. John Zachariah Kiernander, the well-known founder of the Mission Church at Calcutta, first came to the shores of India in that memorable year.

† Owing to a change in the course of the river the position of this place is changed from one bank to the other. This will appear from a comparison of Major Rennell's map (1781) with the position which the village now occupies. The poet, Bharat Chandra also says,

"গিরিয়া মোহানা দিয়া, অগ্রদ্বীপ নিরখিয়া,
নবদ্বীপ পশ্চিম বাহিনী।"

*Man Sing.*

Durbar as to whose estate the place belonged. The agent of the Patuli Zamindar apprehending very serious consequences from the utmost displeasure of the Nawab if he gave out the truth, denied that the village appertained to the Zamindari of his master. The agents of the Burdwan Rajah also said that the place was not included in the Burdwan estate. In this way several others also replied to the same effect. But when the turn of the agent of the Nadia Rajah came, he, more clever than all the rest, finding the present a fit opportunity of doing a good substantial service to his master, replied that the village belonged to his master, and, as to the incident referred to above, he explained it away by reporting that the crowd was so very great that in spite of all efforts to the contrary such incidents could not be avoided and artfully added that it was really a wonder that there were not more deaths from the terrible jostling of the assembled crowd. Most of the gentlemen present at the Durbar testifying to the truth of the statements made by the Nadia agent, the Nawab excused the party, dismissing him with a warning to be more careful for the future *. The joy of Roghunath, in whose time this unlooked for acquisition was made, as it were, by a piece of sheer good luck, knew no bounds, and rewarding his clever agent very handsomely took possession of Agradwip with great pomp and circumstance. This event must have taken place before 1729 the year in which the said Rajah died and was succeeded by his son, the illustrious Maharaja Krishna Chandra Roy.

When Govindadeb closed his earthly career his only child was in his mother's womb. This posthumous son is known in history as Rajah Nrisinhadeb Rai Mahasai.

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* See Kartick Chandra Roy's Kshitish Vangsavali Charita p p. 142, 144.



Rajah Nrisinhadeb Rai Mahasa.

# CHAPTER VIII.

## Rajah Nrisinhadeb Rai Mahasai.

This noble scion of a noble house saw the light of heaven three months after his father's decease. In the meantime a rumour had got abroad that Govindadeb had died without male issue and that the Bansberia Raj stood in need of a proper representative. This *on dit* for which there was very little foundation had gained such publicity that even the birth of Nrisinhadeb did not serve to silence it. Taking advantage of this fortuitous circumstance Manick Chand, * Dewan to the Raja of Burdwan, made a false representation to the Durbar at Murshidabad ignoring the birth of the Bansberia Prince, and his representation produced its desired effect. Ali Verdi Khan, who then held the reins of the Bengal Government, taking a fancy to do a good turn to the Raja of Burdwan, settled the vast estates left by Govindadeb with him. In April 1741 the Raja took forcible possession of the hereditary Zamindari of Nrisinhadeb on this side of the river, while Raja Krishna Chandra of Nadia who was almost supreme on the other side, and who also could not resist the temptation of having his hand in the pie got hold of pargana Halda which formed a part of the

* This gentleman was a very noted character. He rose very high and ultimately became Dewan to the ruler of Bengal. While Foujdar of Hooghly he held a chief command in the army of Seraj-ud-dowla and took part in the taking of Calcutta. The terrible ignominy of the Black-Hole massacre he shares with the Nawab. Indeed, some historians throw the whole blame upon him. When Clive and Watson came from Madras in order to take revenge on the captors of Calcutta and the perpetrators of the Black Hole tragedy, he had gone to Budge Budge (Danish Lodge) to oppose their progress but deeming resistance vain, hastened back to Calcutta and from thence marched to Murshidabad leaving 500 soldiers for the defence of the town. Though not daubed a Raja or Rai, Manick Chand's influence was very great, and his self-conceit much greater.

Bansberia Raj and included it in the Zamindari of his son, Shumbhoo Chunder Roy, which he could easily do, as the revenue of that pargana was payable along with that of his own estate. Nrisinhadeb has recorded the acts of spoliation in his Diary and we cannot do better than quote his words. He wrote:—"My father Govindadeb Rai died in the month of Aswin 1147 B. S. (October 1740 A. D.) I was then in my mother's womb. Manick Chandra, Peshkar * of the Burdwan Zamindar, on a false representation to Nawab Ali Verdi Khan that my father had died without male issue got my ancestral Zamindari, which was acquired by purchase or received under Sanad, included in the estate of his master and unjustly took possession thereof in the month of Baisak 1148 B. S. (April 1741.) and as the revenue payable for the kismuts of pargana Halda was included in the estate of Raja Krishna Chandra Roy, he too in the same year took possession of the said kismuts by including them in the talook of his son, Shumbhoo Chunder Roy. Majkuri talook, mouza Kulihanda, was included in Chuckla Hooghly, Foujdar, Pir Khan, did not allow the Burdwan Zamindar to take possession thereof, hence the said talook is in my possession. Such injustice and illegality has never been done to any Zamindar or talookdar in Subah Bengal" †.

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* He may have been Peshkar before, but at the time he made the representation he was Dewan and the author of the "Seir-Mutaquherin" also describes him as such.

† The original runs as follows:—

"সন ১১৪৭ সালের মাহ আশ্বিনে আমার পিতা গোবিন্দদেব রায়ের কাল হয় সেকালে আমি গর্ভস্থ ছিলাম, বর্দ্ধমানের জমিদারের পেস্কার মাণিকচন্দ্র নবাব আলিবর্দ্দী খাঁর নিকট আমার পিতার অপুত্রক কাল হইয়াছে, খেলাপ জাহির করিয়া আমার পুস্তপুস্তানের জর খরিদা সনন্দী জমিদারি আপন মালিকের জমিদারি সামিল করিয়া সন ১১৪৮ সালে মাহ বৈশাখে খামাখা দখল করে ও হলদা পরগণা কিসমতের মালগুজারি রাজা কৃষ্ণচন্দ্র রায়ের সামিল ছিল তিনিও ঐ সন কীসমত মজকুর আপন পুত্র শ্রীশম্ভুচন্দ্র রায়ের তালুকের সামিল করিয়া দখল করেন। মৌজে কুলিহাণ্ডা মজকুরি তালুক হুগলী চাকলার সামিল ছিল, পীর খাঁ ফৌজদার বর্দ্ধমানের জমিদারকে দখল দিলেন না অতএব তালুক মজকুর আমার-দখল আছে। সুবে বাঙ্গালার কোন জমিদার ও তালুকদারের পর এমত বেইনসাপী ও বেদায়ত কখন হয় নাই।"

The Burdwan Zamindari was, in its inception, of a very insignificant character. The present Raj family was founded by Abu Rai, a Kapur Khetri, of the Punjab, who came to Bengal and got a petty post in the police line under the Fouzdar of Burdwan somewhere in the year 1657 A. D. His son, Babu Rai, acquired some landed property but it was not such as would entitle him to rank with the recognised Zamindars of the country. He was at best a talookdar and possessed some influence in the chuckla of Burdwan. Even in the time of Krishna Ram, the fourth in descent from the reputed founder, the family Zamindari was not of large extent. In 1112 A. B. (corresponding to 1695 A. D.) the Zamindari of Burdwan, as described in the celebrated Fifth Report of the Select Committee, "was of very confined dimensions, comprising no more than six or seven pergannahs in the time of the first Zamindary occupants, Kisheriram (*i. e.* Krishnaram) and Jaggat Roi (*i. e.* Jagatram Roy) of the Kehtry (*i. e.* Khetri) caste, whose names appear in history in the rebellion of Soubah Sing and Cita (?) of Chiteva and Burdah, in the reign of Alemger. Tradition or uncertain family genealogy states parental consanguinity between the last mentioned possessor * of Burdwan Keerutchund (*i. e.* Kirti Chandra) the first of the present race on the Khalsa records, who by successive annexations † in the usual mode of malzaminy operations, had in 1135 increased the jurisdiction to near its actual size, and obtained a common Dewanny sunnud for the same. During the administration of Jaffer and Suja Khan, his son Chitta (*i. e.* Chitra) Sein, was in like manner vested in the office of landholder in 1146, and was

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* Jagatram was treacherously killed in 1702 A. D. He had two sons, Kirti Chandra and Mitra Ram: Kirti Chandra left a son, Chitra Sen, who succeeded him, while Mitra Ram's son Troyluckhya Chandra alias Tiluck Chand succeeded the latter, he having died without male issue.

† Kirti Chandra was very powerful, and added to his ancestral Zamindari parganas Chitwa, Bhursut, Parda and Monoharshahi. He dispossessed the Raja of Chandrakona of his estates, and also seized and appropriated the Zamindari of the Raja of Balghars, a place adjacent to Tarkeswar in the Hooghly district. In this way he had become a very big Zamindar when, the angel of Death hurried him away from this world.

succeeded in 1151 by his cousin Tilluck Chund, father of the present titular Rajah Tye Chund ( *i. e.* Tej Chandra ), who obtained the zamindary in virtue of a Sunnad from the Company soon after his official predecessor's death about the Bengal year 1177 * A. B." Thus, it is clear that it was only in the time of Krishna Ram that the Burdwan House first came to be recognised as Zamindar. In Krishna Ram's time, the rebellion of Soubha Sing, talookdar of Chitwa and Barda, took place. The proud rebel defeated Krishna Ram and made an end of his family with the exception of his son, Jagatram, who managed to escape from the general slaughter. Jagatram was succeeded by the valiant Kirti Chandra who rose to fame and largely added to the Zamindari by successive annexations. He managed to get a general Sanad for the acquisitions so made, thereby legalizing his vast possessions. He died, leaving his son, Chitra Sen, sole heir to his estates. The latter flourished during the rule of Murshid Kuli Khan and his son-in-law, Suja Khan, and was the first to get the high title of "Raja," about the year 1740. He proved worthy of such a powerful father and followed closely in his steps by making fresh annexations to the Raj. The Bansberia Rajah, Gobindadeb, having died in 1740, leaving only a child in its mother's womb, it was falsely reported to the Durbar at Murshidabad that he had died without leaving any issue. This representation was made by the astute Dewan of the Burdwan Raja, the great but not good Manick Chand, who possessed considerable influence in the Nawab's Court, and the result was that the Burdwan Raja was granted permission to take possession of the Zamindari, left by Gobindadeb, after the manner, then so very common of "malzaminy operations" as they were called. As the posthumous child of the deceased who had by this time come out of his mother's womb, had none to advocate his cause, his ancestral Zamindari was without any objection annexed to the Burdwan Raj. This took place in the year 1149 A. B. corresponding to 1742 A. D. nearly two years after the death of Rajah Gobindadeb. Up to this time, even the fact of the deceased having had a son born to him was not made known to the public, at any rate it had not come to the ears of the great Nawab at Murshidabad. And, accordingly, in describing the Burdwan Raja's

* Vide Fifth Report p. 402.

"annexations in 1149," the aforesaid Fifth Report describes the Bansberia zamindari so annexed as the "Zemindary of Govindez," and not of his son, Nrisinhadeb, though by that time, the former had died, and the latter was living as his sole heir-at-law; and it gives in detail the names of the several estates so taken with their respective jummas. All these estates were situate in Chuckla Hooghly appertaining to Sircar Satgaon. They were as follows:—

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|---|---|
| "Arseh, Kismut | 8,378 |
| Havilleesher | 1,920 |
| Selimpoor | 5 574 |
| Mahomedameenpore | 12,394 |
| Hejrah Kahly | 92 |
| Abwab Foujedarry | 3,091 |
| Foyzullapoor | 272 |
| Kahrar Jageer Circar | 8,623–9,752 |
| Boroo | 1,957 |
| Peeyunan | 20,362 |
| Auhar | 4,066 |
| Shaisteranagur | 5,215 |
| Chutypoor | 2,769 |
| Fyghunty | 38" * |

Although these estates fell within Chuckla Hooghly, none of them would seem to have been within the direct rule of the Fouzdar of Hooghly. Arshe Kismut would appear to have been the portion which was left to Gobindadeb's father, Roghudeb, after the big pargana Arsha was broken up and along with a considerable portion of Pargana Boro formed into Zamindari Mahomedameenpore. Havilee Sher, though it lay on the other side of the river, formed a part of Chuckla Hooghly which had lands on both sides. As for Mahomedameenpore here mentioned, it was probably a different estate from the much bigger Zamindari we have noticed above. Hejra Kahly is not identifiable; so are Kahrar Jageer Circar and Auhar, "Peeyunan is evidently pargana Poanan, and Pyghunty seems to be Paighati. Besides the above estates, pargana Halda which also formed a part of the Bansberia

* Vide Fifth Report p. 403.

Raj, as it lay in the district of Nadia, was taken forcible possession of by Raja Krishna Chandra *. Thus, the Bansberia House which not long before occupied the front rank in the aristocracy of Bengal, both in respect of property and of position, was all of a sudden thrown on the background for no fault or laches of its own, This was certainly a most glaring piece of injustice, as the estate, so wrongfully taken possession of, had not fallen into arrears, nor was the owner for the time being, guilty of any misconduct. Indeed, he was not a *doli capax* at all, to use a legal phrase; the head and front of his offending was that he came out of his mother's womb a little too late. This little infant who should have been looked upon with great compassion was on the contrary, reduced to very great straits for no fault of his own or of his agents. The small estate of Kulihanda, was almost the only property left to him and he had nothing else to depend upon for the defrayal of the necessary expenses which were certainly large, indeed. He had no friend or patron to look up to for help and the times too were not at all favourable. The fate, of the Mahomedan Empire was trembling in the balance. The English too were rapidly advancing in power and the Nawabs of Bengal had become mere puppets in their hands. They were playing the game very cleverly and it was almost certain that a change of rule was inevitable. In this very disturbed state of the country young Nrisinhadeb had no other alternative than to wait with patience and bide his time.

In the meantime, events were thickening fast and affairs wore a very gloomy aspect. The Marhatta free-booters had created quite a panic, so that like Cowper's hero in the solitary island of Juan Fernandez the people lived in "constant alarm." The Nawab, Ali Verdi Khan, was, no doubt, a very energetic ruler and was not sparing in his efforts to put a curb upon their incursions. But their rueful raids became so very frequent that he got tired of them and, at last, deeming discretion to be the better part of valour purchased their non-interference by ceding a considerable portion of Orissa and granting the *Chouth* of Bengal. The land

* Some other estates of the Raj were also misappropriated partly with the permission direct or tacit of the ruling power, and partly clandestinely.

again smiled with peace, but unfortunately it was a calm of that description which only boded a storm. The old Nawab died in the early part of 1756 and was succeeded by a wayward youth who bore a very bad character, and who, so far from being fit to rule others, was not even capable of ruling himself. He was a veritable Timon in misanthropy, and his hatred of the English whom he had hated from his very boyhood, was deep and during. It was, therefore, no wonder that shortly after his accession to the throne he quarrelled with them and went to the wildest excesses. He marched upon Calcutta with a large army, captured it in no time and committed that crime, which for its singular atrocity and for the tremendous retribution by which it was followed has no parallel in the records of world's history. The English captives were thrown *en masse* into a dark dingy pigeon-hole like room, where after suffering the greatest hardships and privations most of them closed their eyes in agony and anguish, and the few survivors who toddled out of their nightly prison in the next morning were so horribly disfigured and changed that even their own mothers could not have recognised them at the first sight.

The news of this horrible tragedy reached Madras in August and, as was natural, roused the fiercest and bitterest resentment. The cry of the whole settlement was for vengeance, and within a few short hours it was determined that an expedition should be sent to the Hooghly with Clive at the head of the land forces and Watson commanding the naval armament. This expedition sailed in October, but as it had to make its way against adverse winds it did not reach Bengal till December. Clive with his usual promptitude a once commenced operations with vigour. He took the fort at Budge Budge ( Danish Lodge ) and compelled Manick Chand, the Governor of Calcutta who had gone to oppose them, to beat a hasty retreat. Proceeding onwards, he recovered Calcutta, and marching further up, stormed and sacked Hooghly, the famous port of Wes Bengal. These successful operations alarmed the weak-minded Nawab, who soon came to terms with the English. But the truce—for it was only a temporary cessation of hostilities to gain time—was of a short duration. The treaty was broken, when Clive with his sturdy companions in arms pushed on towards Murshidabad The English general was, if not materially, at least morally, supported by all the greatest natives of Bengal whom Seraj-ud-dowla

had alienated from him by his manifold atrocities and oppression. At last, the crisis came and the English and the Nawab met in battle array at Plassey, where in a very short time the fate of Bengal was decided at once and for ever. The Nawab lost the day and sought safety in flight. The Victor entered Murshidabad in triumph and placed Mir Jaffir on the throne. The new Nawab showed his gratitude by making large presents to the English; but it was not long before he found to his deep regret that his throne was not secure so long as he was in the hands of the English. He, accordingly, opened secret negotiations with the Dutch at Chinsura, who hoping to make another Plassey affair for themselves, acceded to his proposal and brought down a pretty large army from Batavia. But all their hopes were crushed for ever at the fatal field of Bajara, incorrectly called Bidera, where they sustained a signal defeat at the hands of Colonel Forde, who, if he had lived long enough might have proved a worthy rival of Clive himself. The power of the Dutch in Bengal was completely overthrown and they were reduced to a mere trading corporation which they were when they first made their settlement at Chinsura. Three months after this glorious victory, Clive returned to England where he received a regular ovation. The king himself gave him a long interview and readily raised him to the peerage.

Clive's return to England was a signal for the Company's servants to renew their malpractices, and the result was that the country was thrown into the utmost confusion. His successor who lacked his ability and tact, failed to exercise proper control and hence the complicated machinery of Government went out of order. At length, the necessity for a change in the administration became so very great that Clive was forthwith sent back to India to set things to rights. This remarkable man whose bravery on the field was not less conspicuous than his skill in the council, again made his appearance on the land where he had won such high success. As he had anticipated, he met with the fiercest opposition in the matter of the reforms which he was bent on making; but nothing daunted, he proceeded with his work and at last succeeded in effecting it to his heart's content. Order was restored where there was utter confusion and the country again wore a smiling look. Having assiduously responded to the call of duty, Clive left India for good in 1767. But as the seed of corruption

had entered the vitals of Government, the country wanting the helping hand of the disciplinarian, again fell into disorder and misrule. His policy was to a great extent abandoned; the abuses which, it seemed, he had merely "scotched, not killed" began to revive; and at length the evils which a bad Government had engendered were aggravated by one of those fearful visitations which the best Government cannot avert. This was the terrible famine of 1770 which filled the whole valley of the Ganges with misery and death. As Macaulay has with such dramatic effect described it. "Tender and delicate women, whose veils had never been lifted before the public gaze, came forth from the inner chambers in which Eastern jealousy had kept watch over their beauty, threw themselves on the earth before the passers-by, and, with loud wailings implored a handful of rice for their children. The Hooghly every day rolled down thousands of corpses close to the porticoes and gardens of the English conquerors. The very streets of Calcutta were blocked up by the dying and the dead. The lean and feeble survivors had not energy, enough to bear the bodies of their kindred to the funeral pile or to the holy river, or even to scare away the jackals and vultures, who fed on human remains in the face of the day." Such horrible scenes were never to be forgotten, and were faithfully depicted by the feeling poet some years after, in lines, the very sound of which makes one's hair stand on end like "quills upon the fretful porcupine." He says:—

"Still fresh in memory's eye the scene I view,  
The shrivelled limbs, sunk eyes and lifeless hue;  
Still hear the mother's shrieks aud infant's moans,  
Cries of despair and agonising groans.  
Dire scenes of horror, which no pen can trace,  
Nor rolling years from memory's page efface,"

Thus the state of things was simply deplorable, and, surely, it could not have been otherwise, when both God and Man had, as as it were, banded together to effect the ruination of the country. The extent of the fearful unprecedented mortality was never correctly ascertained; but it was believed that the "fell fiend" had been instrumental in sweeping off from the face of the earth, about a third of the whole population.

After the country had, thus, successively passed through

the terrible ordeal of war, famine, and pestilence, a very great change was introduced into the Government of British India. This was effected by the Regulating Act of 1773, which vested the Government of the Bengal Presidency in a Governor-General and a Council consisting of four members, and established in Calcutta a Crown Court of Judicature, composed of a Chief Justice and three puisne Judges, with power to try cases arising within the limits of the Presidency town. Under this Act, Warren Hastings who was then Governor of Bengal was appointed the first Governor-General, and the four members who were to form his Council were Colonel Monson, General Clavering, Philip Francis, and Richard Barwell, all of whom with the exception of the last were imported from England. Sir Elijah Impey was the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The change in the administration was expected to prove beneficial to the country, but it soon turned out to be the very reverse. The three members of the Council who had been sent from the mother country opposed Hastings at every step and, thus, threw the affairs of State into the utmost confusion. But not only was there discord and disunion in the Supreme Council, contention was also raging high outside its four walls in asmuch as the Supreme Court excelling in its pride of place set its bold front against it. At last, matters came to such a pass that there was great probability of the two greatest bodies in the land settling their differences by having recourse to arms. A reign of terror thus began lasted for some years. At length, in consequence of the death of Clavering and of Monson, peace was to a certain extent restored in the Council, but its dissention with the Supreme Court was still going on. When all other resources failed, Hastings pitched upon an expedient which had a talismanic effect. He offered Sir Elijah a seat in the Sadar Dewani Adalat in addition to his chiefship of the Supreme Court, and as a fat pay was attached to the post, the offer was readily accepted. In this way Hastings managed to make his position safe and strong and also to bring back peace into the country, which had left it for such a long period While the country was thus passing through a series of reverses Nrisinhadeb very properly thought that, however well-grounded his claim might be, there was not the slightest chance of its being heard with the attention it deserved, and that he had, therefore, no other alternative left than to bide his time: Rather than have his

case summarily thrown out amidst the pressure of more important affairs it was better to wait until an opportunity presented itself when he might expect to have justice done to him. In this way he patiently waited for eight and thirty years until the country thoroughly recovered from the vortex in which it had so long been whirled about. But Nrisinhadeb did not fritter away his time during these stirring stormy years. Endowed with great parts by Dame Nature, he considerably improved them by culture and laid in a good stock of knowledge and what is more important than book knowledge, experience. He studied Sanscrit, Arabic, and Persian with great diligence and mastered these languages in a comparatively short time. The child is certainly the father of the man, and Nrisinhadeb early showed prognostics of his future greatness and excellence.

The hero that was to be, not only possessed a well-stocked mind, he also bore an exemplary character. He was not addicted to pleasures, improperly so called, but was of a contemplative turn of mind, in which the intellectual prevailed over the sensual. He always preserved calmness of temper, but it was a calmness which was sicklied over with the pale cast of melancholy. The only thing which seemed to have gained a mastery over his mind was the firm resolve to get back the Zamindari which through no fault of his own or his people's had passed into other hands. He was always on the look-out for means to effect his purpose, but this he did not find until Bengal virtually passed into the hands of the English. Clive had laid only the foundation of the British Raj but it was reserved for Warren Hastings to build thereon. The latter was appointed Governor in 1771 and after the passing of the Regulating Act two years later became Governor-General of all the Indian possessions of the East India Company. Nrisinhadeb lost no time in personally applying to the Governor-General for the restoration of his ancestral estates. Mr. Hastings with his usual sense of justice ordered an enquiry, the result of which made it as clear as noonday that gross injustice had been done to Nrisinhadeb. The sympathetic satrap in the natural goodness of his heart wished that he could restore all his lost estates to the wronged party, but this he was not in a position to do, as the power of the Company whom he represented was confined within definite bounds. The Company then acted as the Dewan of Bengal and was Zamindar of the district of 24 Parganas. There-

fore, the most he could do was to restore to Nrisinhadeb only those Mahals of his ancestral Zamindari that fell strictly within the jurisdiction of the English in the 24 Parganas. Thus, the restoration was only partial, but as it was, it brought in a good substantial property and considerably raised the position of the Bansberia House as it then stood. Nrisinhadeb has recorded all this in his valuable Diary *. This is what he wrote:—"In 1185 B. S. (1778 A. D.) the Governor-General, Mr. Hastings in Council having on enquiry and just and equitable consideration came to know that the property in question was my ancestral estate, has since 1186 B. S. (1779 A. D.) given me possession of those Mahals of my ancestral estate which passed from the hands of the Burdwan Zamindar and were included in 24 Parganas, and granted me a Sanad from the Committe and Council. I am in possession of the Parganas † named below:—Baridhati, Ektiarpore, Hathiagarh, Mobai, Nimuck o' Mompunja, Mayda, Magura, Manpur, and Khorda."

Nrisinhadeb had gained the good graces of Warren Hastings not only through the justice of his cause but also by his many

* The original runs as follows:—

"সন ১১৮৫ সালে গবনর জনরল শ্রীযুক্ত মেস্ত্র হিষ্টীন সাহেব ও সাহেবান কৌষল হক ইনসাপ মতে তজবীজ তহকীক করিয়া, আমার মিরাষ জানিয়া আমার পৈতৃক জমিদারির মধ্যে যে সকল মহাল বর্দ্ধমান জমিদারের দখল হইতে চব্বিষ পরগণার সামিল হইয়াছিল সেই মহালাতের জমিদারিতে ইস্তক সন ১১৮৬ সাল আমাকে সরফরাজ করিয়াছেন ও কৌসল ও কমিট হইতে সনন্দ দিয়াছেন।"

† Baridhati, one of the original 24 Parganas, lies south of Calcutta and west of Diamond Harbour. It is in the Baruipur sub-division and contains the villages of Bishnupur, Jainagar and Magra Hat. On 17th March 1788, the Zamindar, Nrisinhadeb Rai made a petition to the Collector representing the ruinous condition of his Zamindari. This was followed by a similar representation on the part of the ryots of the same Pargana in 1790. (See Hunter's Bengal Records). South of this Pargana is North Hathiagarh. It appears that in 1790 both these Parganas were inundated as were some others and that the ryots made a representation to the authorities praying for relief. (See Ibid). Mobai also in 24 Parganas, is famous for its "Hat". Nimuck o' Mompunja appear in Hunter's Statistical Reporter, Vol I simply as Nimak-o-mom that is salt and wax farms.

good accomplishments. He was well read in Sanscrit, Arabic, and Persian and had the reputation of being a ripe scholar. He was also a good poet and could compose verses both in Persian and Bengali. Even the medical science of the day had received his attention and he translated a book on the subject named *Uddish-Tantra* into Bengali verse, so as to familiarise it with the general public. He had also studied the difficult but not the less entertaining subject of Hindu music and had gone so far and deep into it as to be able to compose songs. His extant effusions which are mostly of a religious character plainly show that he was an adept in that divine Art which, wonderful to say, softens the ferocity of the savage and elevates the civilised man much above himself. Indeed, such was his mastery of that branch of *belle-lettres* that he could reduce Hindi songs into Bengali verse and adapt them to the niceties and intricacies of the *Rags* and *Raginis* which regulate Hindu music. He was also a good hand at the sister art of painting, and though certainly not a Huysum or a Reynolds, gained considerable repute as a limner and mapmaker. Warren Hastings having desired to have a good and accurate map of Bengal, Nrisinhadeb was asked to make the attempt. He did make the attempt and succeeded in executing the work very cleverly. On the map being presented to the Governor-General he was highly pleased with it and in token of his great pleasure made a handsome present to the artist. But Ganga Govinda * whose avarice had increased with his influence appropriating the money to himself, gave Pargana Dhanghata to Nrisinhadeb in lieu thereof.

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* Following the example of his patron and predecessor Clive, Hastings engaged the services of some natives of note. Of these men none had greater influence with him than Ganga Govinda Sinha—the founder of the Paikpara Raj. Ganga Govinda had been his Persian tutor and was now his Dewan and as such wielded very large powers. Indeed, his influence in the realm for good or for evil was only next to that of the Governor-General himself. Even Raja Krishna Chandra of Nadia, who was the premier Zamindar of Bengal in his day, when at logger-heads with his refractory son, Shumbhoo Chunder, sought Ganga Govinda's help by a short note couched in these words.:—

পুত্র অবাধ্য, দরবার অসাধ্য।
যা করেন গঙ্গা গোবিন্দ।

Warren Hastings left India in 1785 and was succeeded by Lord Cornwallis who was a far more influential man than his predecessor and wielded much higher powers. Nrisinhadeb who was anything but contented with the few Parganas which were restored to him by Warren Hastings was always on the look-out for an opportunity to regain the many that still remained out of his hands. The new Governor-General was busy settling the State affairs which had fallen into disorder, and so Nrisinhadeb did not think it prudent to trouble him with his own. He, therefore, bided his time and deferred making the representation until a few years after. In the meantime he propitiated the Great on High by building a fine temple and dedicating the same to the Goddess Swambhaba * setting apart talook Gholsara bearing Towji No. 18, in the Hooghly Collectorate to meet the expenses of the Deva-sheba and other contingencies relating thereto. This act of piety was done in the year of grace 1710 Saka era, corresponding to 1788 A. D. as appears from the following couplet inscribed in a stone slab placed above the door-way of the temple :—

আশাচলেন্দু সম্পূর্ণে শাকে শ্রীমৎ সয়ম্ভবা।
রেজেতং শ্রীগৃহঙ্ক শ্রীনৃসিংহ দেব দত্তঃ † ।

The inscription is of the simplest kind possible, and as in the inscription on the temple of Basudeb above referred to, the founder does not make a show of his rank or riches, but describes himself simply by giving his name with the original patronymic of the family affixed to it.

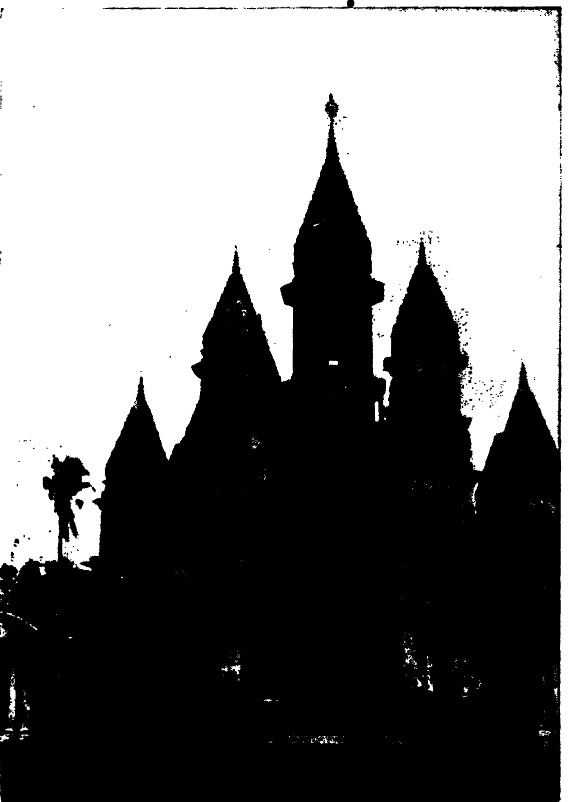
When at last Nrisinhadeb found that Lord Cornwallis was quite in a position to listen to his grievances, he applied to him for the restoration of the rest of his ancestral Zamindari which was

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* The word means 'self-created' or 'self-existent' a name of the goddess Kali. She is otherwise called " Mahishmardini " or the " Buffalo-queller ".

† This is how the year of the building of the temple is made out:—আশা meaning দিক্ represents 10 : অচল = 7 and ইন্দু = I: thus, according to the well-known rule of interpretation of Sanscrit slokas namely, " figures move backwards," the year becomes 1710. The couplet means that the temple to the goddess Swambhaba was embellished ( beautifully built ) by Nrisinhadeb Dutt.

TEMPLE OF VISHNU.



TEMPLE OF HAMSESVARI.

still unjustly kept back from him. The Governor-General gave him to understand that so far as his power went, he could not do him any good *directly* in the matter. He, therefore, advised him to lay his case before the Court of Directors in England, at the same time promising to do what he could for him *indirectly* through his connection with that Court. But appeal to that high Tribunal was not quite an easy affair, it meant a considerable outlay of funds which in the then state of his affairs Nrisinhadeb was not in a position to advance. But the suggestion of the good Governor-General had taken deep and firm hold on his mind and he thenceforward directed his attention towards the procuring of the sinews of war. With this idea swinging to and fro in his mind, he resolved to cut short his expenses but this could not be well done so long as he remained at his house, living in the old customary way. Accordingly, in the month of November, 1792, he started for the holy city of Benares with a few companions, leaving the management of his estate in the hands of an able and faithful relation. At that Holy of Holies, Nrisinhadeb lived a retired life, spending most part of his time with the venerable Yogis for whom he entertained the highest regard. They were all adepts in the Tantric system of *Yoga* consisting in the practice of communion of the human soul with the Supreme Being; and Nrisinhadeb's bent of mind having taken that direction he gladly became a disciple of one of the most eminent among them, and learnt both the principle and practice of Tantric rites at his hallowed feet. But this was not his sole occupation at Kashi. Raja Joy Narain Ghosal, nephew of Gocool Ghosal, the well-known founder of the Bhukailas Raj family was living at that place at the time; he had a mind to translate into Bengali verse that well-known Sanscrit work, *Kashi-Khanda*, but he lacked the ability to do it single-handed, and was, therefore, anxiously in search of a co-adjutor. This second Fletcher if one might say so, he found in Nrisinhadeb who was a good Sanscrit scholar and a tolerable poet to boot. This worthy scion of the Sudramani family of Patuli as Nrisinhadeb * is described in the metrical introduction to the translation, was accompanied by one Jagannath

* In the Introduction to the "Kashi Khanda," of Joynarain Ghosal, Nrisinhadeb is described as a resident of Patuli, though since the time

Mukerjee who also took active part in that labour of love. The work was begun on the 1st of Falgoon 1714 Saka era, corresponding to February 1792, and was not completed until April 1796. Nrisinhadeb took great pains in the getting up of the work and it saw the light of publicity under his superintendence.

While Nrisinhadeb was thus busily engaged in doing literary work on the one hand and learning Yoga on the other, on came a letter from his worthy and honest manager, informing him that favoured by circumstances coupled with care and thrift on his part he had been able to get together a very large sum of money. By this time a wonderful change had come over Nrisinhadeb's mind and he had commenced to look upon this nether world as a place of sojourn where man tarryeth for some time and then passeth away on to where he is to dwell for ever. Indeed, he was advanced too far in the path of virtuous abnegation again to fall back upon grovelling temporal affairs. He gave up the idea of appealing to the Court of Directors in England and made up his mind to devote a considerable portion of the accumulations to the erection

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of his great grandfather, the family had been permanently living at Bansberia. The verses alluded to, are:—

মনে করি কাশীখণ্ড ভাষা করি লিখি।
ইহার সহায় হয় কাহারে না দেখি॥
সিত্রশত চৌদ্দ শকে পৌষমাস যবে।
আমার মানস মত যোগ হইল তবে॥
শূদ্রমণি কুলে জন্ম পাটুলি নিবাসী
শ্রীযুত নৃসিংহ দেব রায়াগত কাশী॥
তাঁর সহ জগন্নাথ মুখুর্য্যা আইলা।
প্রথম ফাল্গুনে গ্রন্থ আরম্ভ করিলা॥

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তাহার করেন রায় তর্জ্জমা খসড়া।
মুখুর্য্যা করেন সদা কবিতা পাতড়া॥
রায় পুনর্বার সেই পাতড়া লইয়া।
লিখেন পুস্তকে তাহা সমস্ত শুধিয়া॥

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পদ্ধতি ভাষাতে করিলেন পরিষ্কার।
রায় করিলেন সর্ব্ব গ্রন্থের প্রচার॥

of a temple at Bansberia. Benares is certainly sacred ground all round, crowded as if with *Houses of God.* On whichever side you turn your gaze, the eye is arrested by a thick forest of temples. Jerusalem is not better entitled to be called the city of shrines than is this holy land of the Hindus. But these temples, numberless as they are, did not satisfy to their full the cravings of Nrisinhadeb's heart; he wanted to find a visible, tangible, epiphany of what according to the Yoga philosophy represents the Divine Force. Accordingly, he made a plan of the temple, contemplated by him, in accordance with the mystic formula of *Shata-Chacra-Bheda,* with five stone staircases to represent the five *Narhies,* or vital channels in the spinal chord, namely, *Era, Pingala, Susumna, Bajrakhya,* and *Chitrini,* and the Goddess Hamsesvari to represent the *Kundalini Sakti* or *Para Sakti* of Yoga. With the view to building some such temple he wrote back to his manager asking him to send a moiety of the money in his hands that he might purchase therewith the necessary materials for the purposes of the intended temple. When the money came, Nrisinhadeb bought large blocks of stone, and sent them on with some noted artists and sculptors to Bansberia by boats down the Ganges, himself following them not long after.

Nrisinhadeb reached home in December 1799 * after an absence of nearly eight years, and at once laid the foundation-stone of the far-famed temple of Hamsesvari. The works were pushed on with vigour but after the second storey was completed the founder was summoned away from this world into the next. Nrisinhadeb after having achieved fadeless fame departed this 'vale of tears' in the year 1802 †. He had two wives, of whom

* This is a very memorable year. In it died the Revd. Zachariah Kiernander at Calcutta after a residence in India of nearly sixty years. But though this year witnessed the loss of one Indian Missionary, it on the other hand saw the arrival of three such men, Marshman and his comrades. The great President, Washington of sacred memory, also died in the same year; indeed, his death took place on the last day of the last month of the last year of the eighteenth century.

† Cuttack which had so long remained in the hands of the Marhattas became the property of the English in this year. The Peace, rather Truce of Amiens was also concluded in the same year.

the elder died a Sati * with him as was then the practice. As for the younger, the well-known Rani Sankari, whom he had married, in 1785, in the forty-fifth year of his age, she was enjoined by her husband to complete the temple which he had commenced to build.

Nrisinhadeb was a remarkable character. True to his name, he was a mighty man of action, and has left a deep dent upon the history of his family which is not likely to be effaced by the wear and tear of time. But for his wonderful patience and perseverance, this family would in all probability have long since floated away down the stream of time, and been heard of no more. He firmly resolved to recover its lost possessions and, at last, succeeded in winning back a considerable portion thereof. He set the Zamindari in fairly good order and was improving it when the hand of Death put a period to his earthly career. He built a splendid causeway across the moat and embellished it by planting rows of Vakul trees on both sides. The boughs of these orderly trees are so curiously interlaced that they form a fine avenue of green luxuriant foliage, by which is approached the grand old gateway at the west end, which like a splendid relic of the past, is the only part left of the old grotesque-looking buildings. Rajah Nrisinhadeb was certainly one of the most noted men of his time. In him was happily combined gracefulness of person with strength of character. He was of a comely presence ; of a sweet and melancholy aspect ; his face was regular, handsome, and well-complexioned ; his body strong, healthy, and justly proportioned, and being of moderate stature, he was capable of enduring the greatest fatigues. Like his body, his mind too was

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* The "Sati" rite, though utterly shocking to ordinary human feelings, was then very common. Some years after, the wife of Ram Mohan Roy's elder brother also died a Sati,—a circumstance which made such a painfully strong impression upon his mind that he ever after laboured hard to stamp it out, and, at last succeeded in doing so in 1829 when a Regulation was passed by the Governor-General Lord Bentinck for the purpose. The last Sati that was perpetrated in the Hooghly District was when Mr. (afterwards Sir Frederick) Halliday was Magistrate. This good man was present on the occasion, and has given a very graphic account of the scenes witnessed by him.

well-stocked with knowledge of a varied nature, which made him an agreeable companion, a useful co-adjutor, and a faithful friend. His diligence was admirable, and his patience more admirable still. He was a man of strong will and firm resolve. Though born in a very rich family, he found himself in a comparatively poor condition. This anomaly he was determined to remove, by regaining the estates which his family had been unjustly deprived of. He had no means at his disposal, nor friends to help him, but he managed to secure both, and succeeded to a certain extent in recovering his patrimony.

Having been bred up in poverty, Nrisinhadeb had learnt the worth of money, and, he, therefore, observed rigid economy in his expenditure. But he was anything but miserly ; on the contrary, he was always forward in doing good deeds. But the one pious act which has deservedly immortalized him is the building of the temple of Hamsesvari. True it is, he did not live to complete it, but if the idea had not struck him and he had not carried it out to a considerable extent, the thing would most probably have not seen the light at all. He was a *Sakta* and was imbued with the Tantric principles of Yoga. The temple with the Goddess enshrined in it is a tangible manifestation of his faith. Like a veritable Hindu of the old type, he lived and moved and had his being in religion. But this is saying only a part of him. In the domestic circle, in his relation with his friends and dependants, in fact, in his general converse with the world, he was almost all that could be wished. He was merciful, modest, chaste, temperate, and religious. In short, he was a really good soul, and in giving a short but faithful portraiture of his character we cannot do better than reproduce with only a slight alteration the words which a noble historian has used in depicting England's royal martyr, Charles I, and say that, "he was the worthiest gentleman, the best master, the best friend, the best husband, the best father, and the best *Hindu* of the age in which he lived."

# CHAPTER IX.

## Rani Sankari and her Son and Grandson.

When Nrisinhadeb died, the property left by him came under the management of his widow, Rani Sankari, who by a regular deed had been duly empowered to do so by her husband. Unlike the females of the day, this lady had learnt to read and write, and, what was still more remarkable, to keep accounts. In point of fact, she was much above the average of her sex, it was, therefore, no wonder that she found no difficulty in personally managing the estate left in her charge. She also, did not forget the injunction of her deceased lord in regard to the temple which he had left unfinished. She continued the services of the sculptors, artists and masons who worked on for a dozen years more until the temple became an accomplished fact in the year 1814 *. It cost a mint of money, nearly 5 lakhs ( £50,000 ) in round numbers. After the building was completed, the pious Rani lost no time in dedicating it to the Goddess Hamsesvari who was enshrined therein along with thirteen Sivas. On the occasion of the *Pretistha*, or dedication, the Rani spent money with both hands loose—a common native expression. She invited Brahmans and Pundits from different parts of India, and gave them valuable presents, and also distributed food and clothing among thousands of the needy and the poor in a way befitting the solemn occasion Indeed, the dedication ceremony was a splendid affair and it cost an immense deal of money. As is the case with almost all big

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* This year, as it witnessed the arrival of the first Protestant Bishop and Metropolitan of all India, Thomas Fanshaw Middleton also witnessed the death of Lieutenant-General Palmer, father of the Merchant Prince, John Palmer, and the "confidential" Minister of Warren Hastings. Both were very distinguished characters in their respective avocations.

Temple of Hamsesvari.

Temples of Hamsesvari and Vishnu.

Hindu temples,* this well-known House of the Divinity has a Sanscrit *Sloka* inscribed on a stone slab forming a part of the frontpiece, which gives all the necessary particulars regarding it. It runs thus :—

শাকাব্দে রস বহ্নি মৈত্র গণিতে শ্রীমন্দিরং মন্দিরং * ।
মোক্ষদ্বার চতুর্দ্দশেশ্বর সমং হংসেশ্বরী রাজিতং ॥
ভূপালেন নৃসিংহদেব কৃতিনারব্ধং তদাজ্ঞানুগা ।
তৎপত্নী গুরুপাদপদ্মনিরতা শ্রীশঙ্করী নির্ম্মমে † ॥

শকাব্দা ১৭৩৬ ।

( This holy temple made resplendent by Hamsesvari in the company of fourteen Sivas who are so many doors to salvation (*Moksha*), was begun by the earthly lord Nrisinhadeb of good deeds, and has in obedience to his mandate been completed by his wife, the auspicious Sankari, who is constantly devoted to the lotus-feet of her Guru. In the Saka year 1736. )

The temple of Hamsesvari is one of the most noted in India, and stands almost unparalleled in Bengal. Not to speak of the mystic character of the plan in which it is built and which none but the initiated are in a position to understand fully, it has a beauty of its own which is not to be found in any other shrine. It is in reality a glorious specimen of the wondrous achievement of the architectural art. Beauty, symmetry and sublimity are so harmoniously combined in it that it cannot fail to attract the gaze and move the heart of the most indifferent spectator. There is so much of the marvellous in it that even a *nil admirari* man finds much to praise in it. The temple of Bhubaneswar with all its vaunted wealth of architecture seems to fall short of it. Like the poet's lady "it is a thing of beauty and joy for ever." Indeed,

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* The year is thus made out :—রস = 6; বহ্নি = 3 ; মৈত্র = 17; that is, 1736 Saka, taking the figures backwards, according to the well-known rule of interpretation of Sanscrit Slokas regarding dates.

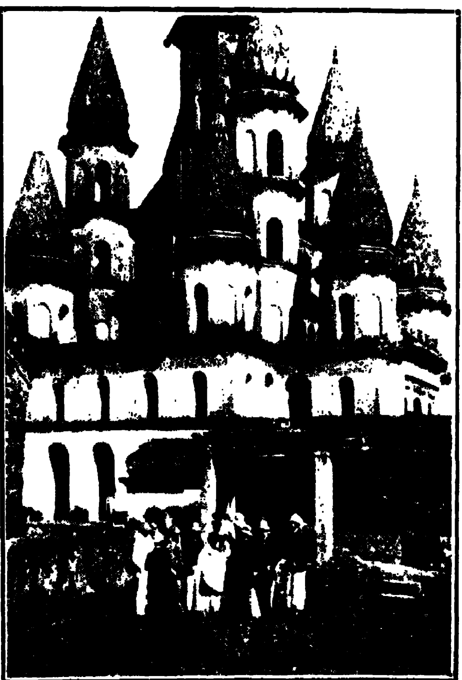
† The Sloka rendered into Bengali stands thus :—

চতুর্দ্দশ মোক্ষদ্বার রূপী ( চতুর্দ্দশ ) শিবের সহিত হংসেশ্বরী কর্ত্তৃক বিরাজিত গৃহ এই শ্রীমন্দির যাহা কৃতী নৃসিংহদেব ভূপাল কর্ত্তৃক আরব্ধ হয় তাহা ১৭৩৬ শাকাব্দে, তাঁহার আজ্ঞানুগা পত্নী গুরুপাদপদ্মনিরতা শ্রীশঙ্করী নির্ম্মাণ করিয়াছেন ।

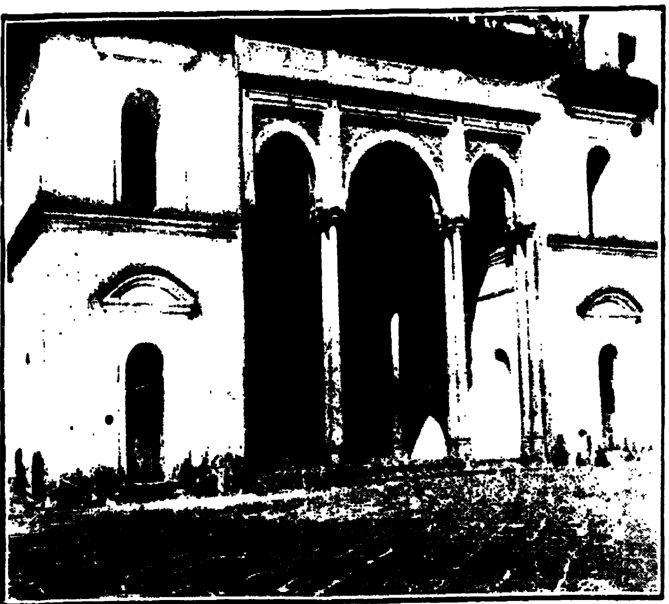
the structure is, to use Thackeray's choice expression, "an out-and-outer" in some respects. On approaching the temple, one is naturally led to think that he is in sight of a most holy object and that he is treading sacred ground breathing inspiration all round; and his mind thus elevated above itself is filled with the mingled feelings of awe, reverence and grandeur. The shrine is a seven-storeyed structure, and its height is very considerable, not much inferior to that of the Ochterlony Monument that stands in its solitary pride on the green grassy Maidan facing the "City of Palaces." It is crowned with thirteen minarets. Underneath the central spire which in height and bulk surpasses all the rest is the presiding Goddess sitting on a lotus-flower whose stalk springs from the navel of a Siva lying supine upon a three cornered *Juntra* (geometrical figure). The Goddess, though a form of Kali, is not "wreathed with human heads", or "pedestalled upon a carcass", as that fierce-looking Deity is generally represented; but looks like a most beautiful lady of sweet sixteen who might well be mistaken for a blue-eyed Houri of Heaven. The witchery of her form and features has a talismanic charm which cannot fail to attract the sight of the dullest and most sheepish of mortals. The Goddess seems formed of stone, but in reality she is made of *Nimba* wood painted blue Above her in the upper storey is a Siva carved out of white marble, as there are twelve others underneath the remaining twelve minarets. In this sacred edifice there is a harmonious combination of grace and grandeur, light and shade, strength and repose. It draws pilgrims from all parts of the country, and has become a famous place of Hindu pilgrimage. Except the reputed shrine of Tarkeswar, there is not another temple in all Bengal which is so much frequented by Hindus as this the temple of the Goddess Hamsesvari. Those persons who come to bathe at the Tribeni Ghat, the south Prayag of the Hindus, always make it a point to pay a reverential visit to this shrine of shrines.

Mr. E. B. Havell has well observed that, "if India has not produced a Phidias or a Raphael, it has created the most magnificent architecture in the world *." A Ruskin finding fault with

* See his article, "The Taj and its Designers," in the Nineteenth Century for 1903.



The Hamsesvari Temple.



Portal of Hamsesvari Temple.

*Blocks kindly lent by the Calcutta Historical Society.*

Mogul architecture as an "evanescent style," might take exception to such remarks, but one who has carefully studied the Indian art and has imbibed its spirit, would feel no hesitation in giving his full unqualified assent to it. Indeed, by voicing such noble sentiment, the great Artist of the present day has only given out the truth. The Taj at Agra which is universally admitted as one of the ten wonders of the world, is a sufficient answer to the disparaging criticism of the "grand old man" of Coniston. True it is, the temple of Hamsesvari cannot be placed on the same platform with that great ideal of the building art, but we must bear in mind that the two things are quite different in their nature. The Temple with its sculptured arches and its spires pointing heavenwards is a symbol as most Eastern buildings are symbols, but the Mausoleum stands alone among Eastern buildings, for it represents in art an attempt towards individualism,—"the proud passion of an Emperor's love wrought into living stone." The one is like the Partheon a shrine for a Goddess—an exquisite casket to contain the jewel; the other is the jewel—the ideal itself. It is this difference in their character which renders it necessary to judge them by different standard. When so judged, the temple of Hamsesvari appears in its true colors and deserves great praise, though certainly not to the extent the Taj does, which stands almost unparalleled in the world. Indeed, the temple is a very beautiful piece of architecture in which Art strives to surpass Nature. It is all throughout nicely carved and ornamented, the general effect of which on the mind of the beholder is very striking. The central block in which the presiding Goddess holds her Court is surrounded by transepts which rest on stone columns and arches. It is circular in plan, and is roofed with a graceful dome, supported by pillars or rather pilasters at the corners of the octagon. The transept in the front or south side is called the *Nat-Mandir*, literally the dancing hall; it is a splendid piece of work, propped up by twelve columns and arches, beautifully carved and ornamented. The painted ceiling, the fine lattice-work above the doorway and the stone fountain below, make up a picture which is certainly pleasing to the sight. On festive occasions, when the whole building is lit up and the fountain is made to play, and the musical band at the *Nahabatkhana* strike up their best, the whole scene with the spacious courtyard ringing with the

muffled eloquence of the ever thickening crowd looks like a thing which exists only in the imagination of the poet or in the fancy of the romancist. In the flowering season when the gay gaudy parterres in their blossoming pride unfold in manifold caskets of all the colors of the rainbow their wealth of odours in the beautiful garden in front, the atmosphere in and around the temple, is saturated with the sweetest perfumes, so very pleasing to the olfactory nerves. The main gateway with its grand orchestra and clock-house are simply imposing. The strait road leading to the royal entrance is a thing of beauty, while the rows of *Vakul* trees which line its two sides all through present a picturesque vista which unites the regularity of the grove with the raciness of the garden.

Rani Sankari was, as we have already stated, a very able and intelligent lady. She understood Zamindari affairs well and by good and efficient management added much to the property left by her husband. Like Rani Bhabani of Nattore, or, to go still higher, Ahalya Bai of Indore, she used personally to go to the Zamindari and see with her own eyes the condition of the tenantry. This direct inspection was undoubtedly a gain to both parties. As for the tenants, it was a real blessing, affording as it did, a glorious opportunity of directly representing their grievances and having them redressed without the intervention of third parties. The landlord too had not to act upon garbled or over-coloured statements and was, therefore, not liable to be imposed upon by his officers whom self-interest often leads to act against the dictates of their conscience. Rani Sankari was anything but a cruel or an exacting landlord; indeed, she looked upon her ryots as though they were her children, and was in turn regarded by them as their much-respected mother. The Rani Mata, as she was commonly called, was viewed in the light of a Goddess, and a notion had got abroad among the simple tenantry that if they took her name early in the morning—a practice which they generally observed—their day was sure to pass off in peace and comfort. In short, she was what is called a model Zamindar whose example well deserves to be followed by people of her class. But though motherly to her tenants, the Rani was discriminate in the matter of the bestowal of favour. She only showed kindness where the case really required it. We happen to know an instance in point. A poor ryot who owing to bad season and the consequent failure of crops could not pay up the



THE ROYAL GATEWAY.



THE VISTA.

rent due, came up to the Rani's Cutchery where she was holding her Court, and placing at a little distance from her some paltry produce of his dwelling abode, stood before her with clasped hands after making due obeisance. On being asked what he had to say, the poor man gave a fair and faithful account of the state of his affairs and prayed that the rent due from him might be remitted. The Rani very properly thinking that the case really required relief at her hands, not only remitted the rent due from the tenant but also directed the Gomastha of the village to supply all his wants so long as his affairs did not take a better turn. The fellow overjoyed at the unexpected kindness of the Rani Mata returned home and reported the matter to the whole body of villagers who filled the air with the praises of the Rani. A few days after, a well-to-do wily tenant, envying the lot of his poor neighbour who had gained such high favour as he thought, by making a small present, appeared before the Rani Mata with more substantial presents and making his obeisance in the usual way, prayed to have his rent remitted on the ground of inability to pay. The Rani, whom it was no easy matter to impose upon, at once saw through the whole dodge, and, instead of showing any kindness to the cunning old man, ordered the Gomastha to realise every pice of the rent due without delay. Her order, strict as it was, was promptly carried out and the fellow through sheer shame could not show his face in the village for some time. This right discerning conduct on the part of the Rani, so far from giving any offence to the public at large, became the subject of praise all round.

Though well able to live splendidly, the Rani was, as a matter of fact, very simple in her mode of living. Unnecessary display of pomp and riches she abhorred from her very heart. This was the main reason why she could not pull well with her only son, Rajah Kailasdeb, who was nothing if not showy, and was, as a matter of necessary consequence, a little too extravagant in his expenses. But though simple in her habits, the Rani spent a good deal in charity. Intensely pious as she was, she had deep regard for Brahmans and Pundits and made them presents with unstinted liberality. She took special delight in relieving the distress of the poor and the needy, and her almshouse was always wide open to mendicants and others who stood in need of help and shelter. There have been very few persons in Bengal who were

charitable like her. Indeed, her charity almost passed for a proverb. Not only were the poor fed and clothed, people in difficulty found adequate relief at her hands, and on festive occasions, specially at the time of the Dole Jatra her gifts to the assembled Brahmans and Pundits of Bengal were on an unusual scale. As the talented Babu Akshoy Chandra Sirkar has remarked, she made her parting *Pronam* ( obeisance ) to each of them by presenting one plateful of red-powder and another plateful of money. A Hindu of Hindus as she was par excellence, she had the highest regard for Brahmans : Indeed, she looked upon them as gods on earth. One instance out of many would, we hope, suffice to show the depth of her reverential feeling towards them. In her time the principal articles of food, such as rice, pulses and the like, used to be sent up from her Zamindari at Hathiagarh, laden in big boats, for whole year's consumption. On the boats reaching the river ghat at Bansberia, it was the practice of the Brahmans of the place to repair to the spot and take out as much of the goods as would suffice to feed them all the year round ; and after they had thus taken out what they required, the remainder went to fill the granary at the Rajbati for the performance of the Deb-sheba, the feeding of mendicants, and such like purposes. On one occasion it so happened that all the goods that had been sent were taken up by the Brahmans, so that there remained nothing to be stored up in the royal granary. Upon this, the man who had been sent in charge of the boats came up to the Rani and in a piteous plaintive tone, informed her of what had happened. The good lady, so far from being vexed or in any way displeased, told him in reply, "the goods and things *have* been garnered up in the granary, aye, they *have* been really so garnered up : Could there be a more striking piece of good luck than this ? " The Rani in the nobleness of her heart verily believed that the supplying the wants of those who are in need, is the best way of storing goods ; indeed, it is, as the poet says, like "hoarding treasures in Heaven. "

The Rani celebrated the *Tula Purush* rite with great *eclat.* This is the " weighing one's person " in golden scales with counterpoise of gold, silver, and other valuables, and distributing the same among the Brahmans and Pundits assembled on the occasion. This ceremony is not peculiar to the Hindus, it was also in use among the Mogul Emperors of Delhi, some of whom were found

to be celebrating almost every year. It was regarded as an auspicious thing which brought in its train peace and prosperity to the person celebrating it. Rani Sankari spent about a lakh of rupees on this memorable occasion.

Though naturally kind-hearted, the Rani was sure to loose the moral equilibrium of her temper at the sight of treachery and wickedness. We happen to know a very striking instance in connection with this trait in her character. This is with reference to her Muktear at Hooghly, whom we would not name for decency's sake, more especially as he is no longer in the land of the living. This man whose duty among other things was to deposit the Government revenue, payable by the Rani, in the Collectorate, had been as usual paid the amount to be deposited in the Collector's Office on a certain occasion. But actuated by wicked selfish motive, he had meant to make default with a view to purchasing the Mahal *Benami* at the auction which would take place in the regular course of affairs. This fact coming to the knowledge of the Rani in the morning of the sale day, her indignation knew no bounds, and instantly ordering a palanquin to be made ready, she, armed with a broomstick—that formidable weapon in the hands of an infuriated Hindu female—proceeded right up to the Collector's Court and reached it when office work had just commenced, and running up, like a veritable Fury, to the spot where that rascal of a Muktear was plying his usual avocation, and abusing him by name, commenced belabouring him with the broomstick, at which all present were struck with wonder and amazement. Roused by the sudden noise, the Collector himself came downstairs and on being informed of what the matter was, tried to pacify the Rani who was still exercising that most effective weapon upon her ill-fated agent. At the earnest request of the great man, she desisted and recovered her usual good temper though not without considerable effort. The Collector wanted to punish the wicked practitioner by handing him over to the Criminal Court, but the Rani who was averse to ruining a man altogether, however much he might deserve it, observing that the severe corporal punishment she had already dealt out was quite sufficient, dissuaded him from proceeding to that extremity. The Muktear was taken severely to task by the good Collector and would most certainly have lost his sanad but for the kind intercession of the Rani.

Rajah Kailasdeb was, as we have already stated, a little too extravagant in his expenses and loved to pose as the Bean Brummell of his day. This was more than his mother, Rani Sankari, could bear who was quite averse to pomp and show. No wonder then that the mother and the son quarrelled, and the matter became so very serious that the dispute had to be settled by aid of Court. Rajah Kailasdeb brought a suit for recovery of possession of his ancestral Zamindari situate in the districts of 24 Parganas and Hooghly, laying his claim at a trifle less than a lakh and fifty thousand. The Rani defendant pleaded that the properties claimed which had belonged to her husband, the late Rajah Nrisinhadeb Rai, had been given her by him and that she had been exercising the rights of ownership in accordance with the terms of the deed of gift and that the plaintiff had no right, title or interest therein. The suit was hotly contested in the Provincial Court at Calcutta where it was brought, and, at length, a decree was passed in favour of the plaintiff. The Rani being aggrieved by the said decree preferred an appeal to the Sadar Dewani Adalat. The appeal dragged its slow length along till the year 1826. In the long interim owing to disputes between the two contending parties, collections had not been made, and the Government revenue having fallen into arrears, the Zamindari, the subject matter of the litigation, ran the risk of being brought under the hammer. In these circumstances the parties came to their senses and agreed to compromise the matter in dispute between themselves. Under the compromise so effected the Rani as Shebait of the newly-established Goddess Hamsesvari got possession of fifteen Mouzas out of the Zamindari of Parganas Hathiagarh and Mamdanipur situate in the district of 24 Parganas and one Mouza named Kulihanda in the appurtenancy of Pargana Arsha in Zillah Hooghly, in all sixteen Mouzas the profits whereof she was to enjoy and spend in performing the Deb-sheba and doing other things specified in the deed of compromise. The remaining property was left in the possession of the plaintiff Rajah Kailasdeb. In the matter of the daily Deb-sheba and the performance and observance of the periodical religious rites and ceremonies the Rani was given full and absolute power, in which her son Rajah Kailasdeb was to have no share or concern. The deeds of compromise were duly filed in Court and

the case was decided by Mr. Courteney Smith, the second Judge of the Sadar Court, in accordance with the terms of the *Razinama* and *Safinama*, as those deeds were called in Court parlance, on the 21st of September, 1826, corresponding to the 6th Aswin, 1233 B. S. after a litigation of nearly seven long years. Rajah Kailasdeb died in the very prime of life. This melancholy event took place in Agrahayan, 1244 B. S. corresponding to November, 1838 *. The Rani, notwithstanding that she was not on good terms with her son, received a severe shock by his untimely death, and, like Rachael weeping for her children, would not be comforted for sometime. But as years rolled by, she felt the softening influence of Time and was herself again.

Rani Sankari was very fond of her grandson, Rajah Debendradeb, the only son of Rajah Kailasdeb. But though Debendra was his only male issue, Rajah Kailasdeb had three daughters of whom Karunamoyi was married to Srinarayan Sinha, popularly known as "Raja Babu" son of the illustrious "Lala Babu" of the Paikpara Raj family. Young Debendradeb had received a good education. Besides Sanscrit and Persian, he knew English well, as would appear quite clear from the fact that he was a Senior Scholar of the old type. He had great taste for music and other fine arts. For his admirable accomplishments he was much liked by the European officials of his day. Not to speak of others, Mr. (afterwards Sir Frederick) Halliday when Magistrate of Hooghly often paid friendly visits to Rajah Debendradeb at his residence. In the palmy days of the Hooghly College the Governor-General himself graced it with his august presence on the occasion of the prize distribution. On one such occasion Lord Dalhousie held a Durbar at the grand College Hall to which the *elite* of the district were invited. Although there were some other grandees present, Rajah Debendradeb was singled out and was given the first place on the right hand side of the great Satrap and he was also the only native gentleman with whom His

* Sir Charles Theophilus (afterwards Lord) Metuze, whose memory is so much revered in India, retired in 1838. This year is also memorable as being the one in which was issued the famous "Simla Manifesto," declaring war with Afghanistan which was attended with such serious loss.

Excellency held conversation for sometime. This was no small honour, seeing that it came from the then first and greatest man in India.

But not only had Rajah Debendradeb parts and accomplishments of a high order, his personal graces were above the ordinary run. An old resident of Bansberia has informed us that the Rajah was a very handsome-looking man and that whoever saw him, would be charmed with his beautiful appearance and cherish a strong liking for him. Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore of Calcutta had once paid him a visit and he was so captivated with his personal grace and polite conversation that he expressed a strong desire to be made one of his friends and associates.

Like that of his father, the tenure of Debendradeb's life was also short, and he was cut off quite in the rosy bloom of humanity. This sad event took place in the month of Baisak, 1259 B. S. corresponding to April, 1852. The sudden death of her beloved grandchild told very heavily upon the old Rani's health and she survived the terrible shock not more than six months. It was in October, on the night previous to the Kali Puja day that this Lady of revered memory closed her eyes for ever in the darkness of death in the eightieth year of her age. Thus passed away from this earth a wonderful character who, although belonging to the weaker sex, possessed qualities and virtues which are only rarely found combined in fallen humanity. Her house was "a temple and her life a law." She was the delight of her own age and the wonder of the next.

The Rani added much to the property which she had got under the deed of compromise effected in 1826. Though naturally simple and economical in her ways and habits, she was deemed one of the most charitable persons of her day. Rani Bhabani of Nattore was not more revered in East Bengal than was Rani Sankari on this side of the Bhagirathi. Indeed, she was held in high esteem not only by the common people but also by big folks including Government officials of rank and respectability. The Rani's name is a household term in Lower Bengal; and the Calcutta Corporation too have commemorated her by naminig after her a street in Kalighat in which a house belonging to the Bansberia Raj is situated.

A short time before her death, the Rani had executed a Will

on the 23rd Aswin 1259 B. S. ( 1852 A. D. ), whereby she endowed all her estates to the Goddess Hamsesvari, nominating her great-grandsons, Rajah Purnendudeb Rai and his two brothers and their descendants as Shebaits. She appointed the widow of Debendradeb, Rani Kasiswari, as executrix to the estate of her minor sons ; and Rajahs Protap Chunder Sinha and Iswar Chunder Sinha * of the Paikpara Raj family, kindly volunteered their services and managed the estate in conjunction with Rani Kasiswari, then a young widow.

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* Both Protap Chunder and Iswar Chunder had been adopted in the Paikpara family, the latter having been taken as son by Rani Karunamoyi, daughter of Rajah Kailasdeb, and the former by another wife of Srinarayan Sinha. They loved their wards with more than a brotherly love. They also looked after their estates with due care and attention. But when Iswar Chunder, and, after him Protap Chunder, died in rapid succession and their estates came under the management of Mr. Harvey, Rani Kasiswari was compelled through necessity to take sole charge of the estates of her minor sons, and, be it said to her credit, conducted the management with ability and prudence not quite common in her sex.

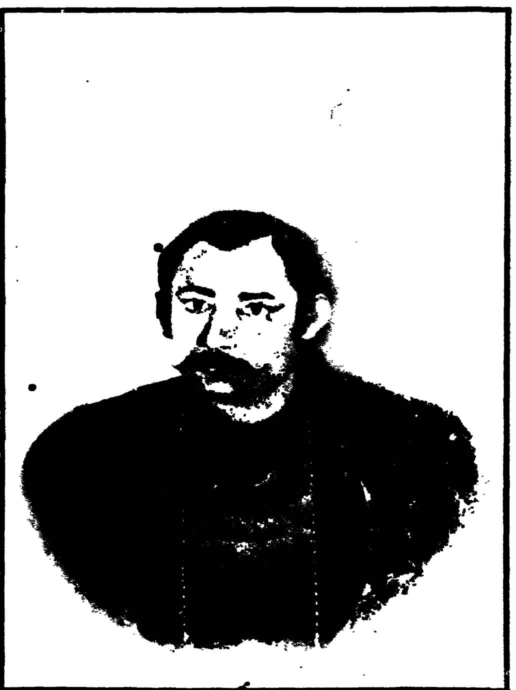
# CHAPTER X.

## Rajah Purnendudeb Rai Mahasai.

When Rani Sankari departed this world, her eldest great-grandson, Rajah Purnendudeb was only nine years of age. His relations the Rajas of Paikpara, took due care to give him proper education. This young scion of a noble House was admitted in the Hooghly College, then a very flourishing institution, where he acquired a fair knowledge of English. He was also interested in Sanscrit, Arabic and Persian and thus became a little bit of a linguist. But in after life when he was master of himself he paid particular attention to the study of English literature and Sanscrit learning, and turned out a good scholar in both. Rajah Purnendudeb was a God-fearing man and always proved true to his word. He would on no account give the go-by to his promise. This fine trait in his character had developed itself when he was in his teens. While under the guardianship of the Paikpara Raja Protap Chunder Sinha, young Purnendu had promised a donation of Rs. 1000, for some good purposes. This fact coming to the ears of the noble guardian, he took to task his little ward, saying that he had done wrong in making such a large promise, and then added that, as he was quite a boy, he might slip out of his promise and not pay the money. Upon this, Purnendu, boy as he was, was deeply affected and in half anger and half sorrow used these memorable words in reply :—Most respected cousin, I hope you would not in right earnest advise me in that way. If you don't pay the money out of my estate, I shall earn the amount by the sweat of my brow and fulfil my promise by paying it. When knowing full well that the object was good and noble for which the promise was made, I will never swerve from the right path but stick by my word. Do you wish me to become a shame and disgrace to the family I am descended from? Is money of greater importance than promise willingly and deliberately made?" Noble-souled Protap Chunder being quite charmed with the high-mindedness of



*From a photo taken in 1864.*



*From an oil painting painted in 1878.*

RAJAH PURNENDUDEB RAI MAHASAI.

the boy, readily taking him up in his arms, exclaimed in the ecstacy of joy, "you are really a brilliant ornament to the family. I give you the money this very moment," and he kept his word to the very letter.

Rajah Purnendudeb was early distinguished for his public-spirit and liberality. During the dark days of the Sepoy Mutiny when still a minor, he did yeoman's service to Government by supplying the local authorities with one thousand carts and coolies at a time when there was not a single cart or a cooly available in this part of the country. His services for the good of his own district are well worthy of notice. The opening of the Trishbigha Railway Station was mainly due to his exertions, and the cost of the metalling of the feeder-road were largely borne by him. The Rajah with the time-honored generosity of the Bansberia House also made a gift of a long strip of land for the construction of a road from the Hooghly Railway Station right down to the riverside for which he was thanked by the then Commissioner of the Burdwan Division, Mr. Charles Francis Montresor *. That road is known as Cockerell Road, it having been constructed at a time when Mr. R. V. Cockerell was the Magistrate and Collector of Hooghly. The Rajah also contributed half the costs of the metalling of the Strand Road from Tribeni to Keota, a distance of about four miles.

But not only did he look to the material improvement of the town and its suburbs, the moral and intellectual amelioration of

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* Vide his letter to the Rajah dated the 30th June 1865 :— "I have received with much satisfaction your note of this day's date and am much pleased to find that you have come to such a very favourable determination regarding the road. The name of the Goddess "Hangseswari" tho' pleasing in application is difficult of pronunciation among the lower classes and especially by those not thoroughly acquainted with Hindu mythology. Perhaps she may have another name (which I am not aware of) more euphonious.

I shall not fail to apprise the Municipality of the intention expressive of the gift of the land for the purpose of the road which will be a great boon to the public, which I am sure will be a gratification to the donor."

Mr. Montresor was a Hailybury man. He came out to India in the service of the East India Company and after serving in various capacities retired in 1870. See Memorials of old Hailybury College.

the people also claimed due share of his attention. He was a warm patron of learning like many of his ancestors. The High English School at Bansberia was founded by him and it is still kept up by his worthy sons. After the abolition of Dr. Duff's 'Bansberia School' * some such Institution was felt as a desideratum, and the good Rajah, Purnendudeb, gladly came forward to meet it. Accordingly, he opened an English School on the auspicious day the 14th January, 1880, and himself bore almost all the expenses for good many years. Afterwards, a terrible malarial fever came upon the place as a blight sweeping off most of its inhabitants, and the Rajah had to close the school for want of school-going lads. Again, on the first day of the year 1893, when affairs were found to have taken a somewhat better turn, he opened the present High English School to meet the educational needs of the townspeople, and, thank God, it is still flourishing under the fostering care of his sons.

But not only did he countenance English education with his powerful support, he also gave encouragement to the study of the neglected Sanscrit lore by maintaining *Tols* and contributing annual stipends to Pundits. A Sanscrit work known as *Kalyarchanbidhi*, or the prescribed mode of worshipping the Goddess Kali, was printed and published at his expense. He also encouraged primary education † by awarding prizes and medals to meritorious students. And as a necessary accompaniment to the betterment of the minds of the people, he contributed towards the recruiting of their health. He maintained a Charitable Dispensary for the poor of the locality. Indeed, the Rajah was a true and warm friend of the poor. If he came to know that a wretched

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* Dr. Duff's School-house was built with Major Outram's Sind blood-money as it was called. See The Story of Bansberia in Dr. George Smith's Life of Dr. Duff. Vol. II. p 50.

† Vide letter of Mr. H. Pellew, Magistrate of Hooghly, dated the 24th Jauuary, 1878 :—"I have much pleasure in thanking you for the assistance and interest you have shewn in the late Patshala Examinations. The presents you made to Gurus and pupils, your hospitality to them and the two silver medals you have given for encouragement of Education in the most backward centres of the district shew the warm interest you take in the welfare of those who are poor and helpless."

soul was ailing without medical aid, he would himself go to his humble abode and make proper arrangements for his treatment, and if the case was very serious, he would not rest content with keeping it solely in the hands of the doctor attached to his Dispensary, but would call in the Civil Surgeon at the Sadar Station of Hooghly, or some other equally competent master of the healing art, and pay him out of his own pocket. Such noble conduct on his part excited wonder and admiration in most people, and if any one of a purely worldly turn of mind tried to dissuade him from making such sacrifices for indigent commoners, he would readily silence him by saying that in his view there was no difference between high and low, sufferings from diseases being painful as much to the peasant as to the prince. In short, he was the *Ma-bap* of the poor and the distressed. The common folks in the neighbourhood still shed tears at hearing his name mentioned, and say in so many words that he was their most intimate friend and greatest benefactor and that his like is not to be found again.

Like his ancestors Rajah Purnendudeb was very kind and open-handed. He duly kept up the *Atitshala* ( alms-house ) at the Rajbati, and, what is more worthy of praise, supplemented it by making contributions to the helpless widows and orphans in the locality whose status in life did not permit them to avail of public charity. Such help, rendered as it was in secret, was much appreciated by the unfortunate recipients who blessed the Rajah with both hands and constantly prayed for his happiness and long life.

In times of scarcity and famine, Rajah Purnendudeb provided ample relief for his suffering tenantry and the poor people at large and also subscribed handsome sums at the request of the Magistrate. Indeed, though generally economical like his great-grandmother, the auspicious Rani Sankari, whose example he followed in many respects, he was never found wanting in his duty to the general public in times of need. But whatever he did, he did with "heart within and God overhead :" He had no ulterior object in view but did the thing for its own sake. His charity, unlike the so-called charity of the present day, had nothing of ostentation in it, it was not exercised to gain a name or to achieve fame. Indeed, he was quite Christian-like in his beneficence and his left

hand did not know what his right hand gave. Many of his private charities were not known to the public but there were not a few in and around Bansberia who daily blessed his sacred name for the good he did them by stealth. He also proved a real friend to some big folks, who had suffered from the frowns of fortune. We know of one or two instances of his having materially helped some very respectable gentlemen who for some cause or other had been reduced to great straits. To put the matter in a few words, the Rajah was a truly charitable man and not a base counterfeit.

Rajah Purnendudeb took prominent part in every public movement that was set on foot in his time in the district. He was President of many public bodies notably the Branch British Indian Association at Hooghly, and the Hooghly District Association. He also served as Honorary Magistrate and Municipal Commissioner of the Bansberia Municipality. In fact, he was not sparing in his efforts to do good service to the Government under whose protecting eyes he lived.

The Rajah was held in high esteem by the people of this part of the country. This honour was done him not because that he was the richest man, which he certainly was not, but because of his having added lustre to the much-renowned Raj family. Owing to various causes this family has become inferior in point of wealth to some *parvenu* families which in course of time have grown immensely rich ; but in wealth of honour, they all have to hide their "diminished heads" before it. Mere rank which is "but the guinea's stamp," or riches which are "but the baggage of virtue," have not much value or importance ; but rank which is acquired by a long series of good deeds is of sterling merit and receives due consideration at the hands of the people : It is of a lasting and durable character and does not fade away with the falling off in the ever-changing favour of fortune. The time-honoured Bansberia House possesses some such rank, and however much it may have suffered in its material condition, it is not likely to lose the esteem which it has justly earned by its manifold acts of goodness and generosity and piety.

The Rajah was much respected by the European officials at the Sadar Station and the occasions were not few in which he was consulted by them on some important matters which had



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reference to the administration of the district. Even some of the draft Bills, while in course of progress through proper legislative channel, were sent up to him for opinion, and such was his independence of character that he would never express views which were not quite in accord with his fixed principles. He possessed to an eminent degree what is so felicitously called the courage of conviction, and never failed to give expression to it even at the risk of incurring the displeasure of "the powers that be." But he was not stiff-necked or obstinate: He was always open to conviction and if it could be shown that his opinion was wrong, he would most gladly change it and adopt the right view.

But thoroughly independent as Rajah Purnendudeb was, he was never in the Black-book of the District Magistrates. In connection with this matter we would cite an instance which plainly shows how very high was the regard which they used to show him. For one reason or another, Babu Kalipado Mukherjee, then Deputy Magistrate of Hooghly, was somewhat vexed with Rajah Purnendudeb. When the Lieutenant-Governor came to visit Hooghly, some Zamindars of the district were invited to come and pay their respects to his Honor; and as Babu Kalipado was entrusted with the duty of sending the invitation cards, he purposely and out of spite withheld it from Rajah Purnendudeb. On the list of the Zamindars invited being in due course presented before the Lieutenant-Governor, His Honor, not finding in it the name of the Bansberia Rajah, asked the Magistrate why he had not been invited, at the same time adding that as he was the principal Zamindar in the District he would like to see him first. Upon this the Magistrate stared at Kali Babu with indignant look, who, though panting with fear, somehow managed to preserve his presence of mind, and taking a swift-running carriage, drove direct to the Bansberia Rajbati and taking the Rajah with him came back to Hooghly in no time, candidly confessing to the Rajah and his friends his own inability to deprive the Rajah of the honour which God had given him. Needless to say that the Lieutenant-Governor first saw Rajah Purnendudeb and then the other Zamindars present on the occasion.

But though Rajah Purnendudeb was held in the highest honour, he knew not what pride was. He was as simple as a child and

had good looks for all irrespective of social difference. His affability could not fail to move the hearts of those who came in contact with him; and such was his goodness that he would enquire into the commonest minutiæ of one's domestic affairs and always bear them in mind. Indeed, he was Nature's nobleman and both preached and practised the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man. As for his tenants, he looked upon them as his children, and they in their turn paid him greater respect than they would to their natural father. Peace and harmony reigned in his *Zamindari* and the Gomastas found no difficulty in realising rents. Litigation had almost become a thing of the past in his estates. Even in cases of disputes of a purely private nature, the tenants would not seek the assistance of the Court but refer them to their much-respected landlord. Rajah Purnendudeb Rai possessed the instinct of a good judge and such an adept he was in detecting falsehood and discovering truth that both parties were equally pleased with his decisions. Thus, he was not only a model gentleman, but was also a model administrator of justice.

To his sons he never missed an opportunity of giving good advice. Economical as he himself was, he strongly insisted upon their living within their means. No precept was more frequent in his mouth than the common saying—'cut your coat according to your cloth.' Surely, economy is no disgrace; it is better living on a little than outliving a great deal. But though he always advised them never to squander money, he was most forward in enjoining them to help the needy and the sick. He also counselled them to be open-handed in the matter of the spreading of education and the advancement of Bengali literature. A thoroughly honest man as he was, he always stood in fear of getting into debt and would eschew it as he would eschew the Devil. He thought with Yudisthir the Just that happy is the man who though living upon rice and herbs, is nobody's debtor, and can say—

I live and thrive,
Indebted to no prince or peer alive;

and it is gratifying to observe that his worthy sons have been acting up to it.

The Rajah was himself a very active man, he could not sit idle but would be doing some work or other; and he would never

get anything done by others which he could do himself. He knew very well that idleness is one of the worst enemies of humanity, it is, as a very wise man has said, 'the Devil's cushion;' and that the Almighty in his Supreme Wisdom helps only those who help themselves. The wise Rajah's advice like that of Lord Chesterfield to his son, was not limited in its character but had a very wide general scope. Of all English poets he had the highest regard for that prince among them, 'Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,' and would now and again ask his most beloved ones on earth to bear in mind some of the "wise saws and modern instances" which are interspersed throughout his works like rubies and stones in a nice piece of inlaid work. That well-known maxim which is the quintessence of the wisdom of a thousand years, namely, 'Give every man thine ears but few thy voice' *, he was fond of repeating over and over again. This is, no doubt, a very wholesome maxim and it behoves every reasonable man to follow its spirit. The great poet also warns people from 'entering into quarrel;' but as there may be circumstances under which it would be impossible to keep out of it, he proceeds to say that, 'being in, bear it that your opponent may beware of thee.' What he means to say is that when you are in the fray, try to put down and punish your adversary in the best way you can, so that in future he may not enter into quarrel with you again. In compliance with the golden words of that prince of poets, the Rajah would be advising his sons not to have anything to do with party faction. A partizan can never be a general favourite, and while he sides with one party and takes part in its interests, he becomes an eyesore and enemy to the other. The Rajah would never himself cherish partizanship, and the result was that so far from losing the regard of any party he would not unoften be asked to arbitrate between the two. In this way he gained the esteem of the whole community and was loved by them all. The Rajah was an advocate of ancestor-worship, not certainly in its literal, but in its moral sense. 'More majorum' is a wise old maxim, and he strictly

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* Similar sentiment is put by the poet in the mouth of old Polonius :—

**Take each man's censure but reserve thy judgment.**

observed it in his own life and was very assiduous in insisting it upon the attention and regard of his dear ones on earth. He was often heard to say "Follow the ways of your ancestors and try to keep intact the good works which they have left as a legacy to you." A truly wise man as he was, the Rajah was always alive to the fact, forgotten though it often be, that union was strength, and he would never cease to advise his sons to live as a joint Hindu family. "Divide and conquer" is a very salutary precept and it is true not only in the world of politics but almost everywhere. Of course there might be circumstances, under which it would not be advisable even if it were possible, to live jointly; but such occasions were few and far between.

The Rajah was a very kind-hearted man and he would not hurt the feelings of anybody for nothing. His very nature would not permit it, so good and saint-like he was. There are some people who feel a kind of pleasure in being the cause of pain to others. The Rajah had deep hatred for such intrinsically bad characters and would never associate with them, far less encourage them in their dark doings. This very healthy trait in his character has, we are glad to say, been inherited by his sons who would be the last persons to give without any cause the slightest injury to any one's feelings.

The Rajah was not only a strictly moral man and the most innocent of beings he also possessed accomplishments of a high order. He had a fine ear for music and was also practically acquainted with that divine art which has such a wonderful effect both upon man and beasts. He could not, it is true, sing well, but he was a good hand at playing on the *Setar* and *Esraj.* He also knew a little of the sister art of painting, and, what is quite uncommon among people of rank and riches, could frame earthen models. He was familiar too with engineering and the plan upon which the new Rajbati was built was devised by him without the aid of any engineer whatever. Like some sages and sovereigns of old, the Rajah was very fond of gardening. He always looked after his gardens and made suggestions for their improvement. In this respect it would not be too much to say that he was a model gardener. Sir William Temple was not a warmer lover of this innocent pastime than Rajah Purnendudeb was.

One might think that the man who possessed such wealth of

mental and moral accomplishments was not equally fortunate in the possession of a strong bodily frame. But this was not so. The Rajah was very well-built in his person and his strength was such that he could lift up a heavy arm-chair and walk some distance with it by holding in his right hand only one of its legs. He was a very swift walker and was so quick of pace that very few could overtake him even by running. He was also a good rider and could manage the most unruly of horses. Not less familiar was he with boating and swimming. At sword play too he was an expert hand. Thus, he was an all-square man and excelled in many things. Fear he knew not what it was, and found great pleasure in hunting tigers and other wild beasts. He was also a good shot and like Arjuna of Mahabharat fame could shoot flying birds. His aim seldom missed its mark. Even in times when Hooghly and its neighbouring places rang with wails and sufferings occasioned by the ravages of the dacoits, he would keep open at night not only the main gate of the Palace but also the upper door of the staircases. Thus, he was a marvellously fearless man and made light of the same caused by the dark and dreaded doings of turbulent robbers and other bad characters.

But though the Rajah, was a bit of a Sandow in bodily strength, there was nothing like the roughness of the athlete in him. He was a fine good-looking man and had all the marks of royalty in his person. On the 18th March, 1902 when the late lamented Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir John Woodburn, paid a visit to the Rajbati at Bansberia, the full-sized oil-painting of the Rajah which graces the hall of the palace attracted his sight and standing before it and looking at it minutely for no less than ten minutes gave out in the presence of all who were with him at the time that he did not remember having seen such fine frame and noble features in Lower Bengal. Thus, the Rajah was a prince of men in many respects and no wonder then that his memory is held in such high regard by people of all castes and colours.

The Rajah had very great regard for his mother. In October 1895, he performed her *Tula Purush Dan* with a pomp and liberality not ill becoming his high position in Hindu society. Of course, it was not such a splendid affair as the one celebrated by Rani Sankari; but although it somewhat suffers by comparison, still taken by itself it was a pretty grand affair and had very

few parallels in this part of Bengal. The *Statesman* of the 23rd October, 1895, thus described the ceremony:—"The other day the *Tula Purush Dan*, or the weighing in a balance with counterpoise of precious jewels, gold and silver, of Rani Kasiswari, mother of Rajah Purnendudeb Rai Bahadur, was performed with considerable *eclat*, and over ten thousand rupees were distributed among the Brahmans assembled. Hundreds of eminent Sanscrit scholars and Professors from all the centres of Sanscrit learning, such as Nadia, Bhatpara, Vicrampore, Mulajore and Calcutta, were present, and lively discussions on many leading social questions took place. Thousands of poor and needy were clothed and fed. This was an unique spectacle never witnessed before in this part of the country."

The Rajah whose memory is cherished with such sincere regard, breathed his last on the 25th July, 1896, leaving four sons, *viz*, Satindradeb Rai Mahasai, Kshitindradeb Rai Mahasai, Munindradeb Rai Mahasai and Romendradeb Rai Mahasai, of whom the eldest Satindradeb Rai has assumed the hereditary title of "Rajah Mahasai" and is the recognised chief representative of the House, the others being known as Kumars.

Rajah Purnendudeb Rai had two younger brothers, *viz*, Surendradeb Rai and Bhupendradeb Rai, of whom the latter, though the youngest, was the first in leaving this 'vale of tears.' This sad event took place on the 7th Agrahayan, 1297, when the deceased had barely completed his thirty-ninth year. The second Surendradeb Rai was born in 1256, and was, therefore, an infant of three years when the all-revered venerable Rani Sankari "shuffled off her mortal coil." Surendradeb died on the 16th Chaitra, 1304. This was a very severe shock to his aged mother, Rani Kasiswari, who felt it so much that it erelong precipitated her own end. Surendradeb was an excellent type of a gentleman. He had deep regard for the Hindu religion. His mode of living was markedly simple. He knew not what pomp was, and walked about in the plainest attire. But in all this he merely took after his elder brother, Rajah Purnendudeb Rai who was a real prince among men and of whose like one may search the whole world and yet find a few, a very few only.